

**CENTRE FOR MONITORING
THE RIGHTS AND FREEDOM OF
ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE**

ANNUAL REPORT

**“Violations of the Rights of
Orthodox Christians
in Europe in 2016”**

Impressum:

CENTRE FOR MONITORING THE RIGHTS AND FREEDOM
OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE

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Introduction

The Centre for Monitoring the Rights and Freedom of Orthodox Christians in Europe (CRFO) was established in 2014 in order to monitor violations of the rights and freedoms of Orthodox Christians in Europe. It is supported by the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Council of Europe, presenting its annual report for the year 2016.

The monitoring of the rights and freedoms of Orthodox Christians in Europe within 47 member countries of the Council of Europe entails registering violations of freedoms of conscience, expression, assembly and other liberties and rights. Reoccurring violations include defamation, humiliation, hate speech, discrimination, intolerance, hostility against Orthodox priests, Church property and/or Orthodox believers. The Centre only observes violations that are aimed against the Orthodox Christian faith or morality, whether they are direct or indirect.

As a general rule, the end of each report chapter includes official reactions of the local Churches to the violations of rights of their believers. This is done to inform the various national and international authorities about such cases. Such reactions demonstrate the gravity of the violations that occur.

This report is prepared on the basis of open sources accessible online with references and links. The preference, as a rule, is given to primary sources, such

as websites of local Orthodox Churches, dioceses, parishes, and Church-linked media.

In 2016 the CRFO cooperated with various Human Rights activists and worked with materials from the UN, OSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Union.

This report could not cover all violations due to a lack of information from various countries as well as the difficulty of certain languages. It is necessary to recognize that a lot of information on the violations of the Orthodox Christians in Europe is not accessible in English. Therefore, we welcome any contribution that can be sent to the Center of Monitoring about the violations of the rights of Orthodox Christians in 2016 in Europe and which can complete the present report.

Chapter 1 :

Defamation of Orthodox Churches and believers.

The CRFO observed cases of defamation (presenting in public false information) of the Orthodox Churches in different European countries.

Defamation of an Orthodox Diocese (GREECE)

February 24, 2016 - The Mayor of Kozani (Greece) Mr. Eleftherios Ionnidis was asked from the local TV channel TOP about the arrival of refugees and he said that Metropolitan of Servia and Kozani, Pavlos denied to concede a building which belongs to the church as a shelter for refugees, as the website romfea reports.

Metropolitan Pavlos reacted to this defamation which presents church leaders hostile against Muslim refugees and indifferent towards the human tragedy. He gave an interview on TV channel TOP where he revealed the true conversation that he had with Mayor of Kozani.

Bishop Pavlos said that he explained to Mr. Ioannidis that this building is not suitable for people because there is no electricity, toilettes, heating or water. He suggested Mayor to take the keys of the building in order to see with his own eyes the situation there. Metropolitan Pavlos proposed him to offer food and bedding for the needs of refugees, but it is impossible to offer a building. The Mayor agreed and he took from the bishop 150 blankets, 500 bottles of water. Three priests and some women were cooking food for refugees until 4 o'clock in the morning.

Bishop Pavlos underlined at the end of his interview: "This is all that we have, this is all we can do. Is this the thanking of Mr Mayor for what we offered? What is the purpose of this defamation?"

Sources

<http://www.romfea.gr/diafora/6627-o-mitropolitis-kozanis-apanta-gia-to-gkertseio-binteo>

Defamation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) from mass media (UKRAINE)

February 2, 2016 - "Patriotically oriented" Ukrainian mass media keeps hyping up the "prohibition" of the Ukrainian language in the UOC worship practice by His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphriy. Despite numerous publications by the Union of the Orthodox Journalists and other resources, refuting lies about such prohibition, experts in "customized" reporting pursue with their activity. Journalists from the «Religion in Ukraine», «Observer» and «RISU» editions have placed the other day their own interpretation of the UOC Primate's words concerning a divine worship language in the Church said by the Metropolitan in his interview to the UOJ.

A wave of accusations by the Ukrainian mass media of mythical persecutions of the state language of Ukraine in the UOC churches surged after 28 December, when the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra hosted a Diocesan Assembly of the Kyiv UOC diocese chaired

by His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphriy. At this Assembly the UOC Primate gave his answer, inter alia, to the question of probable extended use of the Ukrainian language in the Church worships. As a reminder, there is a provision currently in force that was approved by the predecessor Metropolitan Vladimir, according to which Ukrainian can become an official worship language in parishes where 2/3 of the parishioners chose to serve in Ukrainian.

His Beatitude Onuphriy stated that no amendments are anticipated as for the use of the divine worship language because “we have services in the old Slavic language – the very language our ancestors used in their church services. There is no way we are going to change it. If a man, in order to make some money, leaves for Turkey or China, he/she will have to learn the languages spoken there, whereas in order to save a soul, one feels lazy to learn their native language”.

These words gave a push to the flood of lies about purportedly anti-Ukrainian position of the UOC Primate. The fact that the UOC parishes continued to have services in Ukrainian before and after 28 December was surely silenced by the “critics”. For when a foe image is being shaped (this is precisely the way all these journalists and political technologists in one treat the Ukrainian Orthodox Church), true information is apparently redundant. If they happen to report it, their comments are specifically confined to the “deeds of Orthodox oppositionists” who dare challenge “obscurant monks”.

The journalists’ publications in the above mentioned “RISU”, “Religion in Ukraine”, and “Observer” is a case in point, when by means of ingenuous manipulations, the

UOC was depicted once more as an anti-Ukrainian collaborationist. The “press tribe” thought up nothing new in this respect. It was sufficient to come up with a scandalous headline, fish out contextual quotes and furnish them with “necessary” comments.

It’s commonly known that the publication’s name has to reflect the article’s content. Not all but just a few readers look through all the news feed, but titles are never skipped, as a rule. It is namely the titles of articles, their informational and emotional message that shape the reader’s attitude to the material published.

Sources

http://www.religion.in.ua/news/ukrainian_news/31710-mitropolit-onufrij-nastaivaet-yazyk-molitvy-mozhet-byt-tolko-cerkovnoslavyanskij.html

<http://obozrevatel.com/politics/71392-ne-zahotyat-sluzhit-onufrij-pridumal-novyij-dovod-protiv-molitv-na-ukrainskom.htm>

http://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all_news/orthodox/uoc/62354/

Defamation of the Khust Diocese (UKRAINE)

February 20, 2016 - The information provided in the publication of the Transcarpathian diocese of the Kiev Patriarchate of the 17th of February on the alleged harassment of the villagers Teresva Transcarpathian region, because they moved to the jurisdiction of the so-called Kiev Patriarchate, does not correspond to the reality according to the press service of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church’s diocese of Khust.

According to the press service of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church diocese of Khust and the website Union of the Orthodox Journalists, indeed they

collected signatures among the residents, but people at the same time they reported that they subscribe to the document on the construction of the chapel and to the registration of the new parish of the UOC.

Thus, the authors of the document failed to obtain 10 signatures. When the priests of the UOC explained to the villagers that it is cheating, 6 persons took back their signatures. Two more persons, they lived for 2 years in a different area and their signatures cannot be estimated.

It is very important to underline that the so-called Carpathian diocese of Kiev Patriarchate was created in 2015.

Sources

<http://www.orthodoxkhust.org.ua/chergovyy-naklep-bedyastosovno-parafijan-sela-teresvy/>

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/v-upts-raskryli-obman-karpatskoy-eparkhii-uaps>

False statements against Archbishop Jovan and the members of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric (MACEDONIA)

April 21, 2016 - On April 21 another hearing in the politically rigged court process against Archbishop Jovan of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Skopje, the bishops Marko of Bregalnica and David of Stobi, as well as against the clergy, monastics and the believers of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric, took place.

On the hearing, as a witness against Archbishop Jovan of Ohrid and the others, appeared the cleric Dimitar Belcovski of the unrecognized Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC).

In his addressing, Archbishop Jovan of Ohrid reminded Belcovski that we were

entering the week of the Passions of Christ, pointing out that he would serve in that week and called upon his consciousness, since from upon statement it depended whether 19 members of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric would be sentenced imprisonment.

MOC and its Synod, are asking for negotiations for solving their problem with the schism, and in those negotiations the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric takes part, but at the same time the representative of MOC, protodeacon Belcovski, with his false testimony on today's hearing, did everything to disadvantage the accused Archbishop Jovan and the other bishops, priests, monastics and believers of the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric, who are being persecuted on religious basis in the last 14 years. We are reminding that in those 14 years not a single day has passed without an ongoing prison sentence, or a court process against Archbishop Jovan and the Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric.

It is also indicative that the witnesses that the Prosecution asked to be called, are still not appearing to testify, thus the Court of First Instance is tendentiously prolonging this court process, scheduling the next hearing for June.

Sources

<http://www.poa-info.org/news/2016/04/20160421.html>

Defamation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church by the Ukrainian TV channel 1+1 (UKRAINE)

April 5, 2016 - Union of Orthodox Journalists published their investigation of Defamation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church by the Ukrainian TV channel 1+1, below we provide text and video of that investigation.

“Gastronomic lust of modern viewers has reached its meticulousness peak now. Therefore, it’s not an easy task even for popular TV channels to retain million ratings.

In the eternal pursuit of exclusive things, certain mass media instead of teaching their viewers to enjoy really high-quality journalist product, stuff up their air-time with half-made products being a mixture of pseudo-investigations and distorted facts. And, of course, “sancta sanctorum” of the television industry is continual and scrupulous work targeted against evident opponents of the channel’s policy. In a word, some are caressed, others – aggressed.

As for such giant as 1+1 channel, they seem to have been pushing their meaningful propaganda against the UOC for a long while now, defining its existence as a threat to the whole Ukrainian statehood; therefore, they resort to any means to convince their audience that the UOC and its parishioners are wishy-washy aliens governed by Moscow. This absolute nonsense is being splashed by the 1+1 journalists in their materials.

Another investigation and another portion of skillfully cooked up lie. In the “Dengi” (Money) program which was launched on 21 March, journalists dared carry out a really audacious investigation. However, it was not the investigation and attempt to expose avid clergymen that appeared audacious, but the work of the journalist, who had frequently concealed actualities merely for the sake of the desired “picture”.

Sources

<https://youtu.be/pT1pRgZikQ>

Ukrainian MIA minister advised radicals to “cool down” during Cross procession (UKRAINE)

July 13, 2016 - Minister of the Interior Arsen Avakov called on “radical and pro-Ukrainian organizations to cool down a bit” at the time of the All-Ukrainian Cross procession in Kiev, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

“We have enough strength, determination and will, the latter even too much, to stop the situation. So Kiev residents have nothing to worry about. What we are concerned with at the moment is that when a large number of faithful, older people, women, etc. arrive here, it may be used by destructive forces for some kind of terrorist act. So we direct all our efforts to prevent it, to ensure the security of the moment,” – said the Minister.

Avakov called on “radical and pro-Ukrainian organizations to cool down a bit”, “the state has enough strength and opportunities to stop this situation,” – he added.

Recall, Parliament Speaker Andrei Parubiy said that the Russian government is preparing a provocation during the procession of Orthodox believers in Kiev. According to him, the enemy is developing plans to destabilize the situation in Ukraine through the creation of an artificial political crisis and unrest in the streets.

Sources

<http://112.ua/glavnye-novosti/avakov-opasaetsya-vozmozhnosti-terakta-vo-vremya-krestnogo-hoda-v-kieve-324623.html>

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/nasushchnyj-vopros/mia-minister-advises-radicals-to-cool-down-during-cross-procession>

“Right Sector” arranged provocation during the Liturgy in Ternopol UOC diocese (UKRAINE)

July 31, 2016 - During the Divine Liturgy, representatives of the “Right Sector” undertook another provocation near Ternopol Cathedral of martyrs Vera, Nadezhda, Lubov and their mother Sophia, as reports the UOJ website.

According to the reports, about 10 men in camouflage spread the posters with insulting signs addressed to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The radicals yelled out unfounded accusations towards the believers and distributed around the leaflets with false information about the Church. When the faithful tried to resolve the situation peacefully by means of constructive dialogue, the “Right Sector” representatives began to threaten the parishioners with massacre.

The believers, outraged by the unpunished incitement of religious animosity during the Sunday worship service in the city center, called the police. However, the MIA enforcers were unable to remedy the situation at hand.

The congregation of the Cathedral wrote a collective letter to the district police division upon inciting religious hatred by representatives of the “Right Sector”. Nearly 80 believers signed the document. Earlier the “Right Sector” activists had filed an application on holding a peaceful action.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/right-sector-arranged-provocation-during-the-liturgy-in-ternopol-uoc-diocese>

“Public Advocacy” calls to stop media publications discrediting Cross Procession (UKRAINE)

July 11, 2016 - NGO “Public Advocacy”, non-profitable non-governmental organization which activity is aimed at human rights defense, called to stop publications in mass media, discrediting the Cross Procession, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

“Publications of mass media journalists which contain discrimination-ridden statements with regard to participants of All-Ukrainian Cross Procession, as well as unverified facts, violate the principles of journalist’s ethics, incite religious animosity, appear as infringement of the international law regulations, and prove disregard by such journalists for fundamental maxims of law,” the statement says.

“Undoubtedly, the state of Ukraine needs official law enforcement authorities to recognize as unacceptable and respond to such violations in the manner prescribed by law. Participants of All-Ukrainian Cross Procession, as well as persons, who believe distribution of unreliable and discrediting information to be violation of their rights, are entitled to use judicial defense, which response to the above-mentioned evidence will manifest honoring of justice principles in Ukraine,” underline human rights activists.

It will be reminded that on July 3rd All-Ukrainian Cross Procession of peace, love, and prayer for Ukraine started from the Holy Dormition Sviatogorsk Lavra, whilst on July 9th a devotional procession from the Holy Dormition Pochaev Lavra left from the opposite direction for both

processions to meet in Kiev on July 27th.

Sources

<http://www.protiktor.com/>

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/zashchita-tserkvi/public-advocacy-calls-to-stop-media-publications-discrediting-cross-procession5654>

Attacks on All-Ukrainian Cross procession demonstrate uncivilized politicians (UKRAINE)

July 13, 2016 - “People judging the Cross procession, above all, demonstrate their extremely low level of legal culture,” – so described the attempts to discredit the religious procession the executive director of the Ukrainian Institute of Policy Analysis and Management Ruslan Bortnik, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

“On the one hand, we see how an extremely negative attitude to the All-Ukrainian Cross procession is generated in the information field now, – says the analyst. – Clearly apparent are attempts to discredit the Cross procession, using public opinion, which, again, is formed in social networks. On the other hand, the part of the people who take part in the campaign to discredit the procession shows a very low legal culture and lack of culture in general. They demonstrate their “incivility” – this is the exact definition. After all, these people, who are ardent opponents of the peaceful religious initiatives, position themselves as supporters of European values: a European, democratic course for Ukraine. In doing so, they brazenly and cynically violate one of the main tenets of the European system – infringe on the right to freedom of conscience and freedom of speech; the right not to interfere in the affairs of the Church.”

Ruslan Bortnik believes that such behaviour was “appropriate” a century ago. And today it only shows how the declared European values are far from what is actually happening in Ukraine.

“If you look at some of the most zealous commentators, you will see that such “thoughts and appeals” were heard in the XV-XVI centuries, when there was a religious war in Ukraine. That is, we are now witnessing the absolute discrepancy between the proclaimed European ideals and a real mindset of these people. These two components determine the current information field, – the expert believes. – The Church appears poorly protected in the information field. The UOC faithful do not have effective mechanisms to speak out their opinion to the masses of Ukrainians. Today, they are in a very difficult situation of massive defamation without an opportunity to express an alternative opinion.”

Talking about how the officials should act in such circumstances, the political scientist noted that the main thing is to follow the letter of the law.

“On the one hand, the government shouldn’t at least in any way comment on what is happening. State officials shouldn’t even give a hint about their attitude, negative or positive, towards the Cross procession. In Ukraine, the State and the Church are separated. And government officials have no right to express their personal opinion and attitude towards the Church events, – says Ruslan Bortnik. – This is a violation of the law, and for that officials in the same West immediately lose high state positions. The statement recently made by Parubiy (that the Cross procession is organized by the Kremlin, – Ed.) would have cost him his political career in Germany or France.

Nobody would shake hands with him in society. On the other hand, the government should provide adequate protection of the Cross procession. At least at that level that was guaranteed and provided to the LGBT march. Thirdly, the media should cease to disseminate fakes: all these photo- shopped pictures and other provocative “stuff” of the alleged militants heading for Kiev. Here, perhaps, the Church itself should start going to court on defamation charges. I would like to note that the objective media should always present the position of the two sides, and in the same timing. This is called European democratic standards. In the meantime, we can observe the Ukrainian savagery, which is fed by pseudo-patriotism.”

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/nasushchnyj-vopros/attacks-on-cross-procession-demonstrate-uncivilized-politicians-expert>

Increased negativity around the All-Ukrainian Cross procession (UKRAINE)

July 12, 2016 - The head of the analytical center “Third Sector”, political analyst Andrei Zolotarev, spoke out in an extremely negative way on the exacerbation of the negative reaction of part of the Ukrainian society to the All-Ukrainian Cross procession, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

“This is a game of Ukrainian “party of war,” – says Mikhail Zolotarev. – The Ukrainian politicum is quite extensive, but one can clearly identify those groups, especially close to the government, who are working on making conflicts. This allows them to take political and other dividends. The

information field of the last 2 months fixes a clear aggravation of confrontation with the only canonical Orthodox structures in the country – the UOC. This feeding the information field with fake stories that the Cross procession is the “hand of the Kremlin”, “the machinations of the FSB,” etc. It’s emerged not out of nowhere.”

The political expert believes that a lot of present politicians can hardly imagine the consequences of deliberately fueled confrontation.

“It’s not about the procession as such, but about a deliberately stirred atmosphere of hatred, – the expert believes. – Calls to “kill Moscow priests” and a discussion on how to do it best – how could it be viewed? Social networks have long been turned into a tool of mass influence. The fact that such stuff appears there is no coincidence. Unfortunately, all sides regardless of party membership and ideological views will have “to pay the bills.” Religious confrontation drives a wedge in the society and can have dire consequences for Ukraine.”

Speaking on how the authorities should act in a similar situation, Mikhail Zolotarev spoke of the need to strictly follow the letter of the law.

“Participants of the Cross procession does not violate the law, and there can be no claims to them, – the expert believes. – If in our country LGBT marches are allowed, why then not to guarantee the constitutional rights of other citizens? I would like to note that the Ukrainian extreme right forces always work to strengthen what they fight with in words. Therefore, the time of stirred hysteria may result in very real excesses. Ukraine definitely won’t benefit from that.”

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/nasushchnyj-vopros/expert-increased-negativity-around-the-all-ukrainian-cross-procession-is-favourable-to-war-party>

A provocation to discredit the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)

July 18, 2016 - The Ukrainian Orthodox Church has no relation to the meeting organized by individuals at Sophia Square on July 17, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

“The Ukrainian Orthodox Church has no relation to this political event. None of the UOC clerics took part in it and gave the participants a blessing to such political actions,” says the Information and Education Department.

“No procession – all-Ukrainian or such that is organized by dioceses, parishes, monasteries, brotherhoods, sisterhoods, etc. – can be held under political slogans, or be devoted to the events of political life. Therefore, a combination of religious symbols and political slogans is unacceptable, and the gathering of citizens under the walls of St. Sophia on July 17 in no way can be called a cross procession,” said the statement.

“Obviously, this cheap provocation was aimed at discrediting the UOC. This is evidenced by the fact that the provocateurs feel secure in the center of the city, posing in front of photo and video cameras,” summarized the a statement.

Recall, on July 17, in social networks appeared the information that before Saint Sophia Cathedral a group of citizens held a meeting, during which they sang the national anthem of tsarist Russia. The video that

accompanies this information shows that the participants of the gathering held religious symbols in the hands.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/nasushchnyj-vopros/uoc-meeting-at-sophia-square-on-july-17-a-provocation-to-discredit-the-church>

<http://news.church.ua/2016/07/17/upc-ne-imeet-nikakogo-otnosheniya-k-mitingu-na-sofiyevskoj-ploshhadi-17-iyulya/?lang=ru>

Billboard discriminating Orthodox Church set up in Ukraine (UKRAINE)

August 10, 2016 - Obuhov (Ukraine) city's mayor Alexandr Levchenko ordered to dismantle a provocative billboard which is likely to be directed against the Russian Orthodox Church, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

The billboard was set up by Obuhov “Right Sector” division. It reads as: “The Russian Church is an invader's weapon. Ukraine must have the Ukrainian Church.”

Alexandr Levchenko was afraid of the protests of pro-Russian old women – now he will be fought back by Ukrainian patriots,” uttered threats nationalists.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/right-sector-threatens-obuhov-mayor-who-took-down-the-church-insulting-billboard>

European Parliament names Russian religious organizations instruments of external propaganda (EUROPE)

November 23, 2016 - The European Parliament passed on Wednesday a resolution to combat propaganda hostile to

the European Union, which, Brussels thinks, is in particular coming from Russia, as reports interfax news agency.

As many as 691 MEPs took part in the voting on this advisory resolution. It was passed by 304 votes to 179, with 208 abstentions.

The document holds that such propaganda forms part of a 'hybrid war' and seeks "to distort the truth, provoke doubt, divide the EU and its North American partners, paralyze the decision-making process, discredit EU institutions and incite fear and uncertainty among EU citizens."

The European Parliament admits that "the Russian government is employing a wide range of tools and instruments [...] to challenge democratic values, divide Europe, gather domestic support and create the perception of failed states in the EU's eastern neighbourhood," the resolution said.

The resolution mentions among such instruments: "Think tanks [...], multilingual TV stations (e.g. Russia Today), pseudo-news agencies and multimedia services (e.g. Sputnik), cross-border social and religious groups, as the regime wants to present itself as the only defender of traditional Christian values, social media and internet trolls."

According to the European Parliament, Russia is heavily funding disinformation and propaganda, funding political parties and other organizations within the EU in order to disrupt its political unity. The propaganda is aimed at journalists, concrete politicians and EU citizens, the resolution said.

The European Parliament assumes that the bulk of hostile propaganda is based on considering some EU countries within the traditional scope of Russia's influence.

The terrorist organizations Al-Qaeda and Daesh (Islamic State) outlawed in Russia are named among other sources of propaganda which the EU should confront, the resolution said.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13446>

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2016-0441+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

In Lvov region radicals call on boycotting the UOC (UKRAINE)

December 12, 2016 - In Bania Lisovitskaya village of Stryi district, Lvov region (Ukraine) the "Right Sector" activists carried out an action against the UOC. Radicals distributed leaflets and hanged posters of the church fence with "drive away Moscow priests" agitation.

"We are used to such actions, Lvov eparchy commented to the UOJ on the incident. – The faithful keep praying for their persecutors so that God could bring them to reason."

As for the "Right Sector" activists, they post reports on the actions held on their pages in social media.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/in-lvov-region-radicals-call-on-boycotting-the-uoc>

A.Reaction of the Orthodox Local Churches to the defamation against the Orthodox Churches and their believers.

Statement of Metropolitan Porfirije of Zagreb-Ljubljana Statement of Metropolitan Porfirije of Zagreb-Ljubljana about the current attacks on the Serbian Orthodox Church (CROATIA)

January 29, 2016 - Regarding the media attacks of some individuals and associations on the Serbian Orthodox Church, its clergy and the faithful in Croatia, Metropolitan Porfirije made the following statement, as the official website of the Serbian Orthodox Church reports.

“The reason, but not a motive or a cause, for brutal, unprecedented attacks and calls for lynching of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Croatia in recent years, are to be found in a recording created many years ago, during my visit to believers in Chicago, where, as a guest, I was not able to affect all the circumstances. Because of all those who have been in any way affected or felt offended, especially after the abuse and manipulation of the content of the recording by some media, I express my sincere and deep human regret.

The feeling of deep sorrow and regret has been caused also by those who consciously or unconsciously these days contribute to the effusion of intolerance towards the Serbian people, as well as to the deepening of a gap between Croats and Serbs who are inevitably bound to one another.

To anyone that observes my activity and public actions, not only since my arrival in Croatia, but in the last three decades,

it is clear that which is being attributed to me with tendentious interpretation of the recordings does not express views and values that I advocate. Simply, in human and inter-ethnic relations I hold to the words of Christ: “Do unto others as you would have them do to you”. This is the principle upon which I live and I work, and I do not have any other program and ideology except Christ and His Gospel!

I note that such attacks did not surprise me, because when I arrived in Zagreb, I said, in my first sermon, that on both sides there were those who would throw stones at those who build bridges between people and nations. The protagonists of hatred and intolerance will not discourage me, but encourage that that with even more intensity in my heart I cherish Christ’s love towards them, because I know that God, who created all of us for eternity, expects that from me.

For such treatment, I am particularly obliged by numerous individuals and associations who have shown determination that, despite concerted, verbally violent attacks, publicly and privately send expressions of solidarity, encouragement and support to the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Orthodox believers in Croatia and to me personally. They do encourage optimism in me that I, hoping in God, continue with even more power to build bridges of peace, cooperation, mutual respect and love between the Croatian and Serbian peoples as well as between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church, because we are members of the same Christian family

who believe the same Gospel of Christ. To them, who in my opinion and belief represent the majority of Croatia based on Christ's teaching and ethos, I extend my deepest gratitude.

Christ's words: "Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" oblige us to reciprocate to hate speech with love! Consequently, I greet Orthodox believers also at this time with the words of the Holy Apostle Paul: "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

Sources

http://www.spc.rs/eng/metropolitan_porfirije_zagrebljubljana_concerning_current_attacks_serbian_orthodox_church

The Department of External Church Relations reacted to the defamation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)

January 11, 2016 - Ukrainian Media reproduced the fake information from the site "Informator", that a priest (Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Moscow Patriarchate) from Sverdlovsk in Luhansk region (Ukraine), denied to read a pray for the health of a child under the excuse that her birth certificate was delivered in the Ukrainian territory, as the website pravmir reports.

The Department of External Church Relations of the UOC (Moscow Patriarchate) commented that in the city of Sverdlovsk there is a chapel in honour of St. Agapit of Caves. There is a rector and priests there.

In the article of the site "Informator" is not specified the name of the priest, the names

of women and children who were victims of such a misconduct. Archbishop of Rovenky and Sverdlovsk Pantaleon said that his office is always open for parishioners to denounce any possible cases of improper behaviour of clergy. If the case with the woman is a real, she can come to the bishop and tell him about the incident.

The Archbishop Panteleimon was in Sverdlovsk and he had opportunity to learn about this "incident". "It is obvious that in this case we are talking about defamation against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church," said on the official Facebook page of the Department for External Church Relations of the UOC.

Sources

<http://www.pravmir.ru/v-upts-nazvali-provokatsiyu-informatsiyu-ob-otkaze-svyashhennika-molitsya-za-zdorove-rebenka-2/>

Orthodox Bishop makes serious denounces for a plan against Orthodox people (GREECE)

February 17, 2016 - Bishop of Kos and Nisyros (Greece), Nathanael, spoke to the radio station Alpha, as the website ekklesiaonline.gr reports. The bishop denounced a plan against Orthodox people of Greece who are obliged to live with a huge number of refugees with many consequences in their spiritual life. The bishop said that he saw with his own eyes, journalists from foreigner channels who were giving 20 euros to some persons in order to pretend the dead near the sea. He also said that all this situation is a war of impressions. The bishop expressed his opinion because it's his local diocese who takes care about the nutrition and other needs of the refugees who arrive every day to the island.

Sources

<http://ekklisiaonline.gr/eipan/item/11545-sovares-kataggelies-koou-nathanail-ksena-kanalia-brosta-sta-matia-mas-edinan-20-evro-se-anthropous-gia-na-kanoun-tous-pnigmenous>

False statements against an Orthodox Monastery (SERBIA)

February 10, 2016 - Archimandrite Luke, the hegumen of the Carno monastery in Srebrenica (Serbia) responded to false statements in an open letter to the mayor of the community of Srebrenica Durakovic Kamil, as the official website of the diocese reports.

The television show Network, which was broadcasted live on the eve of St. Sava on FTV organized by the mayor of Srebrenica, Camil Durakovic, brought several false allegations against the monastery of the Holy Virgin in Carnot and the monastery brotherhood. Epiphany bathing which has been carried out on the lake Peruchats on the river Drina for three years already, below the monastery Carnot, Mayor Duraković and Prohichi villagers interpret as the construction of “drug rehabilitation center.”

Glava Durakovic, who has long been concerned about the Serbian Orthodox Church, Republic of Srpska, speaks of “the establishment of a systematic approach to serbianization of the territory.”

In response to the slander, Archimandrite Luke (Babich) writes an open letter explaining that the Serbian Srebrenica of Svetosavskoy land of Nemanchey and Lazarevic has a long history, it was for centuries Serbian, it can't be subject to serbianization and that Mr. Durakovic and his people need the help of Centre curing falsehood, which is constantly directed

towards the Serbian people and the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Here is the letter of Archimandrite Luke:

“Mr. Durakovic,

With regards to slander expressed by you on the eve of St. Sava on FTV in the program” Network ” there is no answer other than “disappointed but not surprised”.

At first I thought it was a new episode of “Surrealist” but soon I realized that it was the answer to “Dr. Nele”.

You mention “serbianization” as if there hadn't been centuries-old Serbian homes and Islam came with the Ottomans, thereby misleading the public. We're here, Mr. Durakovic, 800 years after Saint Sava. And instead of congratulating us with the day of Glory, Saints and Serbian educator Sava as an educated and civilized mayor of the city where the headquarters of Metropolitan of Srebrenica are located, you are slandering.

How is it possible to “serbianizate” the city ruled by an autocrat St. Stefan Lazarevic, son of St. Prince Lazar, the Great Martyr of Kosovo and Metohin. He is the eternal ruler, who is still protecting this city, and he has no need for a permanent collection and calculation of the number of “votes”. Because the truth is not in the number of voices and cries but in the righteousness of God.

Do you know, Mr. Mayor, that the autocrat St. Stefan Lazarevic was among the best swordsmen and knights in all of Christian Europe. And the fact that you “Knights” were seen last year when you broke into the monastery of the port wearing army boots, uniforms and with rifles and hunting dogs during a religious service. One of the dogs ran to the monastery kitchen and bit me. The

only one who falls into someone else's yard in army boots and rifles (as you say in the show) is your "hunting" Mr. Mayor.

Why don't you tell the public Mr. Mayor about the "peace" neighbors that fired at the monastery. Why don't you say that the police confiscated three guns from one of them Alic Smajil (two military and one hunting) and equipment that destroyed the monastery fence. Or is the arrest of terrorists "prosecution of peaceful repatriates."

Why don't you tell the public about the cases of poaching in the monasteries on Christmas Eve?

You have the nerve to discredit the Serbian Orthodox Church although our bishop, the Rev. Mr. Chrysostom warned you to choose your words when talking about the clergy of Srebrenica. After all these events you have no moral right to refer to the Serbian Orthodox Church. Why all the hatred and passion, Mr. Mayor? The municipality is being shamelessly used for attacks on the Church. The budget is composed as woman says: "If I do not like the priest, I do not give him anything." Look out the window at the facade of the church. In the municipality of Srebrenica there are two old Nemanjic monasteries which you can reach through a dirty road. Instead of paying attention to your duties and responsibilities you are spreading lies and hatred via federal media. Do you have conscience and responsibility? Or have you launched an election campaign? Mr. Mayor, we don't want and will not be held hostage to "mark Srebrenica", as you like to say. If you asked us, we would have explained to you that on the feast of the Epiphany the Christians consecrate water, rivers and lakes for swimming with a greeting "God shall answer."

And you came up with a story about the "withdrawal from drugs". It is ridiculous! It seems to me that you are the one who needs the most Center curing lies where patients can be healed with the truth. And you might as well go with frivolous journalist with the show, pack "the Bosnian air" and export it, since cutting a swath is obviously what you are good at. Mr. Mayor, when the fog clears the Holy Cross and the Church of Christ will shine and you will be just another in a series of historical persecutors of Christ.

It seems to me that you are against all that is Serbian but not against the Serbian money. If we ask you to explain what you do not know and it will not seem ridiculous, because in the end you're the mayor of the municipality of Serbia.

The Serbians are a peaceful nation, there is no one who can frighten them with "serbianization" and don't you worry about the Serbians because this nation will stand as long as our God lives and our souls are alive".

February 10, 2016

Archimandrite Luke (Babich)
Hegumen of the Carno monastery and all the brotherhood in Christ

Sources

<http://eparhijazvornickotuzlanska.info/index.php/2013-06-17-20-33-21/eparhijske-novosti/1824-reagovanja-manastir-karno-camil-durakovic>

The head of the UOC: Deputy Musiy's allegations about secessionist literature in Lavras are unfounded. (UKRAINE)

April 6, 2016 - The president of the Synodal Juridic Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Alexandr Bahov said

the allegations of deputy Oleg Musiy about the availability of secessionist literature in Kiev Pechersk and Pochayiv Lavras are unfounded, as the website Union of Orthodox Journalists reports.

‘The allegations of Mr Musiy are unfounded! I suppose that they are based on the doubtful journalistic investigations that are currently being dispersed by mass-media. But this may not constitute grounds to accuse the church of separatism.’ – said the president.

‘Has Mr Musiy personally seen books calling to separatism in Kiev Pechersk and Pochayiv Lavras?’ – asked rhetorically the archpriest Alexandr Klirik and pointed out that dispersing information with secessionist connotation is punishable by law. ‘This case must be investigated by law enforcement authorities with the relevant expertise of the material within the framework of the criminal proceeding. Only after this the court may decide whether the person accused of dispersing secessionist information is guilty or not. This is what we call presumption of innocence. The constitution provides for it,’ he stressed. Let us recall that on Friday, April the 1st during a regular session of Rada, the parliamentary of ‘People’s Control’ party, alleged that secessionist books are available on the shelves of Kiev Pechersk and Pochayiv Lavras.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/zashchita-tserkvi/glava-yurotdelav-ups-zayavleniya-musiya-o-separatistskoy-literature-v-lavrakh-bezosnovatelny>

Bishop Clement (Vecheria): Law enforcers should deal with officials provoking inter-religious crisis (UKRAINE)

July 12, 2016 - Intelligence agencies should examine the statement of Andrei Parubiy, the speaker of the Ukrainian Parliament, about possible provocations during the cross procession, said in his interview to the channel “112 Ukraine” the Head of the Information and Education Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Bishop Clement, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

“The official reaction must not be just as a sign that the UOC does not accept and condemns such statements of Ukrainian politicians, but we have special services and authorities in Ukraine that should keep track of such statements of the politicians who incite inter-religious enmity, whose activities are threatening to further fuel existing sensitivities and to further destabilize the present tense and fragile situation in the country. Those special services and authorities should address the statement of Parubiy,” said Bishop Clemens.

“I think his statement today completely complies with all the articles of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, which allows the law enforcement to stop all attempts to foment sectarian strife and discrimination of citizens of Ukraine on the religious ground,” concluded the Bishop.

Recall, on July 11, speaker of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine Andrei Parubiy said that the Russian government is preparing a provocation during the All-Ukrainian cross procession in Kiev. Parubiy stressed that not only civilians but also provocateurs with the banned symbols and symbols of

the aggressor-country are heading for the Ukrainian capital.

Sources

<http://ua.112.ua/suspilstvo/v-upts-mp-vvazhaiut-shcho-spetssluzhby-povynni-vyvchyty-zaiavu-parubiiia-pro-mozhlyvi-provokatsii-pid-chas-khresnoho-khodu-324163.html>

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/nasushchnyj-vopros/bishop-clement-vecheria-law-enforcers-should-deal-with-officials-provoking-inter-religious-crisis>

Cyprus Ombudsman interferes religious issues of Orthodox Church (Cyprus)

September 23, 2016 - Head of the Cyprus Orthodox Church, Archbishop Chrysostomos II, lashed out at the report submitted by Ombudsman Elisa Savvidou regarding the initiative of a state nursery school to take its students to worship holy relics at a parish church saying that she has overreached herself, as reports in-cyprus.com website.

Speaking during Mega's main news bulletin, the Archbishop said that the worshipping of relics and icons was not a new phenomenon, stressing that: "It's not the Commissioner's concern on how our people practice their faith. She is overreaching herself, it's not her job. She shouldn't involve herself with issues of faith especially without asking us."

The Archbishop added that teachers were obliged to offer not only knowledge and morals to the children but spiritual guidance too.

"This is our faith. We don't force anyone to worship, it's each individuals' personal choice," remarked the Archbishop.

The salvo came after Savvidou's report was circulated in parliament on Wednesday.

In her report, Savvidou hit out against the Education Ministry following the administrative decision of a state nursery school to take its pupils to a church of the parish to worship the "holy remains" and to receive communion without the consent of the parents.

Savvidou was alerted to the issue following a complaint submitted to her office against the Education Ministry by the President of the Cyprus Humanist Association, Viana Eriksson.

Savvidou's report, dated August 30, 2016, strongly indicates that this kind of activity associated with the doctrine of a religion does not belong in schools as they are a synthesis of opinions and cultures and for this reason should remain neutral and impartial.

Sources

<http://in-cyprus.com/archbishop-tells-ombudsman-to-butt-out-of-religious-issues>

Chapter 2 : Humiliation, hate speech, inhuman treatment and murders of Orthodox Christians.

Attack on an Orthodox priest (UKRAINE)

January 10, 2016 - Unknown persons threw stones at the house of archpriest Ioann Savchuk, rector of the church in the village of Podluží Dubno district, Rivne region (Ukraine). The priest said that this was an act of revenge from the supporters of the Kiev Patriarchate, as the website of the Union of the Orthodox Journalists reports.

Archpriest Ioann Savchuk actively supports the Orthodox Christians to protect their churches in the village of Ptichia, and in other towns and villages of Rivne region. “It’s a warning against me. I connect the aggression towards me with the events that took place in the village of Ptichia. Since I came from there, I actively supported the Orthodox of Ptichia who defend the right to keep their own church. Supporters of the so-called “Kiev Patriarchate” are very embittered with the clergy of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church because we defend the Orthodox churches,” said the priest.

Police was informed and the case is under investigation.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/v-podluzhe-rovenskoy-oblasti-dom-svyashchennika-upts-zabrosali-kamnyami>

Orthodox priest complains to German authorities about harassment on Christians at refugee camps (GERMANY)

January 12, 2016 - Christian refugees are

exposed to harassment at the refugee camps in Germany, says Hegumen Daniil (Irbits) superior of the St. George the Victorious Monastery in Gotschendorf (Moscow Patriarchate), member of the Integration Committee at the German Federal Chancellery, as reports interfax.

“Christian refugees from Syria, Eritrea and other countries are exposed to humiliation, manhunt and brutal harassment at the camps for refugees by Muslim neighbours. This also relates to the Yazidi religious minority. The cases when humiliation comes to injuries and threats of death are frequent,” the priest said in a letter to Federal Minister for Special Affairs and Head of the German Federal Chancellery Peter Altmaier, the copy of which is posted on father Daniil’s page in the social network.

Former Muslims who converted into Christianity are exposed to special risks, the priest said.

“According to the Islamic tradition, they should be punished, because they fell apart from Islam. They are exposed to a tough pressure and they are afraid of their life, because ‘renegades’ lose any right for it for radical Muslims,” the letter said.

Scared about their life, many refugees have to spend nights outside the camps. “Many Christians who came from the Middle East are suffering from such a strong harassment that they want to come back home, because their situation there seems to them a lesser evil as compared to the circumstances at German refugee accommodation centres,” the priest said.

The police rarely interferes in the settlement of religious conflicts, he said.

“We ask you to exert the necessary pressure so as to ensure the observation of the German legislation at the German centres for asylum seekers and ensure that Christians will be accommodated separately from the Muslims,” the priest underlines.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12653>

Russian official accuses Kiev of growing aggression against Orthodox believers (UKRAINE)

February 11, 2016 - Russian Foreign Ministry human rights ombudsman Konstantin Dolgov has accused Kiev of escalating aggression against Orthodox believers and churches of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine, as tass.ru reports

“Pressure on freedom of media, lack of investigation into tortures and continued use of torture methods at prisons of Ukraine is unfortunately added by another theme that has been escalating of late – I would call this aggression, large-scale attack on legitimate rights of Orthodox believers in Ukraine,” Dolgov told a session of Duma’s working group for legal analysis of legislative procedures and enactments adopted in Ukraine.

Foreign Ministry’s commissioner for human rights, democracy and the rule of law explained that he referred to an ongoing “vicious chain of arson attacks on Orthodox churches of the Moscow Patriarchate, their seizure by force with the help of volunteer battalions, the Right Sector (radical nationalist movement) with direct

connivance and sometimes participation of law enforcement agencies.”

Sources

<http://tass.ru/en/politics/855952>

OSCE has received a report on the violations of the rights of believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (UKRAINE)

February 13, 2016 - Ukrainian human rights organization “Public Advocacy» provided the OSCE (Department of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) the report on the violations of the rights of believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in western Ukraine, as the website uoj reports.

As it is indicated in the report, a significant part of the offenses, including those which are aimed at inciting hatred committed by clerics and activists of the Kiev Patriarchate.

In particular, lawyers, and observers from the “Public Advocacy” NGO conducted a monitoring of human rights and religious freedoms in Ternopil, Rivne, Volyn, Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kiev regions and in the Carpathian region in the period 2014 – 2015.

“In all these regions have been identified violations of the rights of religious organizations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church,” – the document says.

The report listed violations of the rights of believers of the UOC, including quotes, statements, adherents and clergy of some denominations, photo, video evidence and eyewitness testimonies.

They are recorded 44 conflict situations. At the same time, as noted in the report, the

faithful of the UOC are not allowed to have access to the temple, or there are clashes between parishioners and the supporters of the Kiev Patriarchate.

“The rhetoric of hate is widely used in the capture of the UOC iconic buildings, is in the nature of propaganda and aimed at destabilizing the socio-political situation in Ukraine”, concluded the lawyers and monitors “the Public human rights protection.”

Documents and materials are also channeled through TANDIS system to be included in the annual reports of the OSCE and the ODIHR human rights violations. Also the material is transferred to international organizations that monitor the violations.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/obse-poluchila-otchet-onarusheniyakh-prav-veruyushchikh-upts>

St. Petersburg City Court confirmed that the online community shall be blocked for insulting the feelings of Orthodox believers (RUSSIA)

February 16, 2016 - The judicial panel of the St. Petersburg City Court (Russia) dismissed the appeal of the representatives of LLC Sarafanka (enjoys the rights on the trademark MDK – “IF”) concerning blocking of the popular online community VKontakte as Interfax reports.

The chairman of the judicial panel announced that the decision of Smolny District Court of October 27, 2015 shall remain in full force and effect and dismissed the appeal.

Earlier the press service of the Prosecutor's Office of St. Petersburg reported that the Community MDK revealed “facts of public

desecration of religious and liturgical literature, objects of worship, ideological symbols.” In addition, it contained information that adversely affected the mental state and behavior of adolescents.

The investigation of the online community was carried out by appeal of a citizen, who pointed out on systematic distribution of the content insulting the feelings of believers.

In August 2015 the representatives of the supervisory authority appealed to the Smolninskiy District Court of St. Petersburg and demanded to deny access to the Internet community MDK in the social network VKontakte. The court satisfied the claim by its decision of October 27, 2015.

The virtual community MDK in VKontakte has more than 7 million subscribers and is one of the most popular in the Russian segment of the Internet.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=61965>

Review of statements in mass media and published sources Hate speech of the UOC-KP and UAOC representatives (UKRAINE)

February 11, 2016 - The Ukrainian human rights organisation “Public Advocacy” published the Review of statements in mass media and published sources Hate speech of the Kiev Patriarchate and Ukrainian Autonomous Orthodox Church representatives The full text of the report you can found here.

Sources

<http://orthodoxrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Review-of-statements-in-mass-media-NGO-Public-Advocacy.pdf>

Orthodox Christian activists demanded to ban the concerts of a Polish band Batushka (RUSSIA)

February 10, 2016 - Roman Plyuta, the Chairman of the non-governmental organization "Orthodox Union" (Krasnodar), addressed to Alexander Bastrykin, the chairman of Russian Investigative Committee, demanding to prosecute the organizers of concerts of Polish metal band Batushka ("Father"), to be held in Moscow and St. Petersburg in April, interfax.ru reports.

"The doings of the "Batushka" band have all the signs of incitement to religious hatred in full conformity with Articles 148 and 282 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. And the purpose of their attacks is Christians. We demand from the law enforcement agencies to pay close attention at this fact in order to avoid possible provocations, both before and during and after the concerts," – said Plyuta to "Interfax" agency on Saturday.

In Russia, the band's concerts are to be held in St. Petersburg and Moscow in early April, they are dedicated to the release of their first album – Litourgiya ("Liturgy"), consisting of eight songs under the name Yekteniya.

"That is, eight supposedly Christian litanies – prayer petitions. But in the tracks of those "prayers" feature songs of a pseudo – church choir with distorted words of the Church Slavonic language, interrupted with typical of the "black metal" music sounds, growl and hysterical shrieking. The lyrics of the first song are a Psalm by Prophet David which is turned inside out. The words are changed and they turn out to be spoken on behalf of Satan" – said the Orthodox activist.

He emphasized that until recently the band "Batushka" was absolutely unknown in Poland or anywhere else. The producers having released their first album "Liturgy" in December 2015 announced that the band was absolutely anonymous, but assured that its musicians are well known.

"In our statement addressed to Bastrykin we provide information that the new brand may be hiding the musicians of another scandalous band from Poland – Behemoth, whose oeuvre is frankly satanic, anti-Christian and occult in nature", – added Plyuta.

The Behemoth band's tour in Russia in 2014 under the title "Russian Satanist" caused mass protests of believers and failures of concerts in different regions. As a result, in May 2014, the lead singer and seven other members were detained in Yekaterinburg, brought to administrative responsibility, and expelled from the country because they did not have a special work visa, which would allow giving concerts.

Sources

<http://www.interfax.ru/russia/495537>

The Ukrainian human rights organisation "Public Advocacy" published the Report on violations of the rights and freedoms of religious organisations in Western Ukraine (UKRAINE)

February 8, 2016 - The Ukrainian human rights organisation "Public Advocacy" published the Report on violations of the rights and freedoms of religious organisations in Western Ukraine which contains new facts and details: evidence of violations in 2014-2015, Ukrainian Courts decisions,

examples of hate speeches in resolutions of state authorities and other information in regard of violations of the rights of Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The full text of the report you can found [here](http://orthodoxrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/The-Report-NGO-Public-Advocacy-of-violation-of-UOC-rights_2016.pdf).

Sources

http://orthodoxrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/The-Report-NGO-Public-Advocacy-of-violation-of-UOC-rights_2016.pdf

UN Human Rights Monitors met Faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)

February 1, 2016 - A meeting of UN Human Rights Monitors with priests and the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) of the Moscow Patriarchate was held in Kolosova, Bashuky, Ekaterinovka, and Uhly villages of Ukraine, as reports press-service of the UOC MP.

On 30 January 2016 in Kremenets the representatives of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Ukraine Clare William and Natalye Pilipow had a discussion with members of orthodox communities of Kolosova, Bashuky, Ekaterinovka, and Uhly. Residents of these villages have been repeatedly subjected to violence and threatened with bodily harm by the “Kyiv Patriarchate” followers supported by radical groups hostile to the UOC. Local communities of the UOC in Bashuky and Ekaterinovka have their churches seized while in Kutly the worships are constantly hampered.

The representatives of the UN Human Rights Mission were shown evidence of violation of rights of UOC followers in Ternopil region and introduced to the problem of persecution of priests and church members

by representatives of the Kiev Patriarchate, within the juridical field.

The monitors of UN Human Rights Mission in Ukraine listened to the messages of local Christians and expressed their hope for further cooperation in the framework of their monitoring mission. The Human Rights Mission publishes monthly reports on the situation of human rights in Ukraine and proposes recommendations for its improvement.

Sources

<http://news.church.ua/2016/02/01/ternopilska-oblast-viryani-rozpovili-predstavnikom-monitoringovoji-misiji-on-pro-utiski-z-boku-rozkolnikov/>

Dean of Orthodox cathedral is beaten up in Chernigov (UKRAINE)

February 1, 2016 - An attack on the dean of the Holy Transfiguration Cathedral in the city of Chernigov, Ukraine Archpriest George Shcherbatyuk took place on the evening of January 31, as reports website pravoslavie.ru. One of the attackers has been identified: it was deputy of the Desniansky district council Yunis Askerov. The archpriest's injured lip was stitched and he was diagnosed with a concussion at the regional hospital.

“On January 31 we had an evening service at our church, and I drove to the baptistery at 5 p.m. There two people came up to me, one of whom introduced himself as deputy of the Desniansky district council, and asked why my automobile had been driven onto the territory of the green zone. I asked him to show his documents which was followed by a pause. Then I said to him that I am dean of the Transfiguration Cathedral and he instantly punched me in the face and cut my lip. Another man immediately came

up screaming, “A bloody separatist!”, and hit me over the head,” Archpriest George Shcherbatyuk related to the Pravlife.org portal.

Then the assailants started breaking the doors of the dean’s car, knocked down the rear-view mirror of the neighboring automobile, and as they came up to the third vehicle, a man who was passing by threatened to call the police.

“They did not expect that anybody would oppose them. They only cried out, ‘Do you speak Ukrainian?’ and swiftly went away. In all probability they were in a state of alcoholic intoxication, because sober people do not behave this way,” the dean of the Transfiguration Cathedral said.

The police squad on its arrival showed the archpriest a photo array from which he identified one of the assailants: it was indeed deputy of the Desniansky district council of Chernigov Yunis Askerov. His companion, however, has not been identified so far.

An infliction of bodily harm has been reported to the police.

“As for parking the automobile near the church, a road sign there allows us to do it. The community had arguments with the nature reserve on this matter but they have stopped because we have a right to drive onto our territory. This is the land of our community there, we labor and serve there, and there is a need to bring building materials, flour for baking communion bread, take small children for baptisms, as well as sickly parishioners who are unable to get to the church on their own,” Archpriest George Shcherbatyuk explained.

In his view, the reason for the assault has nothing to do with any offences.

“I believe it was a politically motivated assault,” he said in conclusion.

Sources

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/90262.htm>

<http://www.pravlife.org/content/deputat-raysoвета-napal-na-nastoyatelya-spasskogo-sobora-v-chernigove>

Patriarch of Georgia and the Georgian Orthodox Church are accused of hate speech and intolerance in the report of the Commission against Racism and Intolerance of the Council of Europe (GEORGIA)

March 28, 2016 - The report of the Commission against racism and Intolerance of the Council of Europe presents its report and attributes hate speech and Intolerance to Patriarch Ilia and the Georgian Orthodox Church, as it is referred on the official website of the CoE.

On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) issued guidelines to all 47 member States of the Council of Europe on how to prevent hate speech, support those targeted by it, and deal with its consequences.

The ECRI published on 1st March 2016 its monitoring work about Georgia in its report. According to it: “Hate speech against LGBT persons ranges from insults in daily life to hateful comments made by politicians, journalists or members of the Orthodox Georgian clergy. The situation worsened during the discussion about the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity into the anti-discrimination law”. The report continues against the Georgian Orthodox Patriarch Ilia: “Hate speech also occurred

during protests against public LGBT events to mark the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO), for example in May 2013. The Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church called the LGBT events “an insult to the Georgian nation” and “homosexuality a “disease”” (p.16 of the report).

The report mentions that “although the Constitution provides for freedom of religion, the general situation is characterized by a close relationship between national and Georgian Orthodox Identity. Such an ethnoreligious identity nexus portrays adherence to the Georgian Orthodox faith, to which more than 80% of the population is affiliated, as essential for being Georgian. Minority religions are often viewed as alien and potentially dangerous to the cohesion and survival of Georgian society, especially when they are associated with ethnic groups that have ties to neighboring countries. The near monopoly of one Christian church has not facilitated the creation of a constructive pluralistic religious tradition in the past” (p. 27 of the report).

ECRI recommends solving the remaining disputes about religious property in a speedy, transparent and fair manner. It also recommends amending the strategy for the development of a religious policy to focus on the rights of religious minorities, the principle of non-discrimination and the promotion of religious tolerance from a perspective of inclusion and integration.

Metropolitan of Bortzoni (Georgian Orthodox Church), Serafim, was very surprised with this report and the accusations against Patriarch Ilia, as the website romfea reports. Metropolitan Serafim, underlined that homosexuality is against the principles of Georgian people. The Patriarch didn't

condemn anyone, but he informed about something which is referred in the Bible. He also said that priests have the duty to prevent people from making sins.

The Abbess of the Georgian Monastery Saint Barbara (Tbilisi), Serafimia, commented in the website romfea this report as an “attack against the Orthodox Church”. “I expressed my discomfort about this report which is an offence against the personality of Patriarch Ilia and the Georgian people. How can we talk about racism and intolerance when in Georgia we have more than 300 mosques”? No one needs such Europe, which imposes to us the same-sex marriage. This Europe offends Christ”, said the Abbess.

Sources

http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Library/PressReleases/209_2016_03_01_Georgial_en.asp

<http://orthodoxrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/GEO-CbC-V-2016-002-ENG.pdf>

<http://www.romfea.gr/patriarxeia-ts/patriarxeio-georgias/7285-igoumeni-serafeimia-auto-einai-xtupima-kata-tis-orthodojias>

A criminal attack on the lawyer of Ternopol Diocese (UKRAINE)

March 22, 2016 - Human rights activist is constantly subjected to insults and humiliation from the representatives of radical group “Right Sector”, as reported by the Information and Education Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

On 22 of March, after the hearing in the Court of Appeal of Ternopol region the unknown attacked Zakharchuk A.P., a lawyer of Ternopol Diocese (Ukraine) of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Zakharchuk A.P. is defending the right of St. Michael's Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the

village community Butin Zbarazh district on its own temple, which was taken away by separatists using the classic raider scheme in October 2014. Then, at the time of take-over the representatives of the “Kiev Patriarchate” gained over the support of the radicals from the “Right Sector” allegedly “because they feared provocations.”

The abuser with the face covered by Balaclava approached the human rights activist from the back and poured on his head Brilliant Green dye. Because of the eye contact with antiseptic Andrew Petrovich got burned, there is a corresponding medical certificate.

As a result of the attack the criminal proceedings were opened.

The lawyer says that he is constantly subjected to humiliation and insults from the representatives of the “Right Sector”, who attend the court hearing. They allow themselves to push a defender, deliberately trample on his legs and threaten him with physical violence. Therefore, it is likely that the attacker is a member of the radical group.

Such mayhem outraged believers of Ternopol Eparchy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, as radicals have repeatedly excited religious conflicts in the region. As the facts show the arbitrary actions of the “Right Sector” reveal their neglect of the Ukrainian legislation and open disregard for the Constitution.

Sources

<http://news.church.ua/2016/03/24/zloumyshlennik-sovershil-napadenie-na-yurista-kotoryj-zashhishhaet-prava-veruyushhix-ternopolskoj-eparxii/?lang=ru>

Hate speech from a priest of Kiev Patriarchate against the faithful of Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)

March 6, 2016 - A Kyiv Patriarchate minister called for crackdown on the parishioners and priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church during the rally in the Independence Square in Kiev, as the website uoj reports.

Among the attendants of the rally were Yulia Tymoshenko and Oleg Lyashko. According to the source, the representative of Kyiv Patriarchate also requested to include in the Ukrainian government the representatives of the nationalist forces. According to his opinion, without them, Ukraine will not be able to survive.

“Let the ones who cannot hold weapons draw inscriptions on the walls of those who attend the churches of Moscow Patriarchate throw “Moscow priests” out of the churches if those priests are leading us to Russia, it is necessary to make sure that they get there”, – said the cleric of Kyiv Patriarchate.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/svyashchennik-upts-kp-otkryto-prizval-k-raspravam-nad-veruyushchimi-upts>

A priest's wife was killed (UKRAINE)

April 28, 2016 - Unidentified criminals attacked a house of the rector of St. Andrew Church in Dnepropetrovsk Archpriest Anatoly Lysenko (Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate) and killed his wife, as the website Interfax-Religion reports.

Criminals invaded the priest's house in the village of Obukhovka of the Dnepropetrovsk

Region in Ukraine on Tuesday night, tied his wife up, then laid her to the floor with her face down and started taunting her, parishioners of Father Anatoly's church told Interfax-Religion.

"Beating the priest, they questioned him, and continued violating his wife. Then the band divided: some of them stayed in the house where they beat Irina to death, while others took Father Anatoly to the car and drove him to the night cemetery where they long and violently beat him and then leaved among the graves (probably, they thought that the priest died from injuries,)" the interviewee of the agency said.

When the priest gained conscience, he managed to reach the neighboring village and told his deacon over the phone what had happened, the deacon called the police. Father Anatoly is staying at the intensive care department of the 6th city hospital in Dnepropetrovsk.

The parishioners connect the crime with the revenge of the self-proclaimed Kiev Patriarchate as he sued the cemetery church from it five years ago.

Requiem service for Irina Lysenko and her burial will take place on Thursday after the Liturgy in St. Andrew Church in Dnepropetrovsk.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12917>

Violent actions against Orthodox faithful (UKRAINE)

April 4, 2016 - Those who were locked without food and water inside their own church have been finally replaced by

others who volunteered to go in, reported Archpriest Anatoly Bogdanov, head of the local deanery, to the information and educational department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. Fr. Anatoly is currently on the scene, in Pticha village of Ukraine's Rivne region, as the website pravoslavie reports.

"On Saturday April 2, we managed to replace the people who had been locked inside the church with others. And yesterday we handed over water and food to our faithful," he said.

The events in the Pticha village developed on March 30 after an unsuccessful attempt to block the Kiev-Chop international highway, made by representatives of the so-called "Kyiv Patriarchate". The attempt failed and as a result the representatives of the so-called Kiev Patriarchate locked the Orthodox faithful inside the church for three days without water and food.

According to the priest, in recent days the aggression took the form of solely verbal abuse.

"The 'Kyiv Patriarchate' community's representatives are continuously threatening UOC-MP faithful. All you ever hear there is insults directed at those who are in church, and the schismatics are promising to deal with them," Fr. Anatoly said.

He has reported that more than ten police officers are currently on the territory of the church, maintaining order together with local residents: representatives of the 'Kyiv Patriarchate' along with clergy and laity of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

However, representatives of the local and regional authorities are acting passively and ignoring the situation, the archpriest stated.

According to an earlier report by the information and educational department of the UOC-MP, the representatives of the so-called Kiev Patriarchate are tooth-and-nail striving to influence the regional administration and the public, demanding that the Holy Dormition church be transferred to them and claiming their rights to it. Meanwhile, various courts in Ukraine have more than once confirmed the legal right of ownership of the religious community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the church building in Pticha.

Sources

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/92244.htm>

Ukrainian MP's hate speech against UOC believers appealed to the Prosecutor General's Office (UKRAINE)

July 7, 2016 - The publication of political expert Yuriy Romanenko on the necessity to crucify "Moscow priests" served as a handle to appeal to the Prosecutor General's Office, as reports UOJ. Member of the Parliament Yevgeniy Murayev requests the authority to take a look at Romanenko's post in Facebook and, if necessary, to bring the political expert to justice for calling for the murder on grounds of religious intolerance.

"Either out of stupidity or (most likely) ill intention, such "experts" push Ukraine, among other things, towards religious war", wrote the deputy on his page in Facebook. – "A direct implication of their work is aggressive church raiding, during which people's heads remain miraculously safe. A direct implication of their work is an ever deepening split in the state and escalation of mutual hate among its citizens".

According to Murayev, such individuals like Romanenko act as opinion leaders and shape more primitive minds to a particular standpoint and actions. In the case at hand – to massacre of the faithful.

"If the current authorities used their wits, these agitators would be brought to justice on a regular basis and rule of law would be drummed into their dumb heads", concluded the MP.

Political expert and journalist Yuriy Romanenko in his post of 5 July declared that "Moscow priests are trying to organize a cross procession from the LDPR in the direction of Kiev. To be more precise, not the priests but the clergy-aided Kremlin. How should we act? First of all, we should broadcast at all channels that outside the front line all participants of the cross procession will be crucified. Secondly, to put crosses beforehand on the roadsides. The effect will be stunning".

Sources

<https://www.facebook.com/yuriy.romanenko/posts/1142850369070026?pnref=story>

<https://www.facebook.com/yevgeniy.murayev/posts/845890675514777>

In Pereslavl-Zalessky Father Superior of St. Trinity Danilov Monastery was killed (RUSSIA)

July 7, 2016 - Hegumen Daniel (Sokolov), Father Superior of St. Trinity Danilov Monastery in Pereslavl, was killed in his cell, as reports pravoslavie.ru. As reported by TASS with reference to the press service of Pereslavl eparchy, "the body of the monastery prior Daniel (Sokolov) was found after the morning service in his cell. St. Trinity Danilov monastery is small in number and

poor enough to assume that the prior was killed for profit". The 42-year-old hegumen Daniel was buried by the altar in the monastery on July 10, 2016.

Metropolitan of Yaroslavl and Rostov Panteleimon presented his condolences: "Having chosen the monastic way, Father Daniel came to beloved St. Trinity Danilov monastery. He rebuilt the monastery; his prayers were among the first prayers that were made in the walls of the monastery after the return of the Church shrines. Several years later, Father Daniel was given the obedience to work as a Father Superior of St. Trinity Danilov Monastery, to minister the parishioners, revive and build up the monastic life. And this obedience Father Daniel carried with love and humility. We trust in the mercy of God and believe that the prayers and works of Father Daniel will be taken by Merciful Lord, and the Lord will give him rest in Heaven. Eternal memory to the deceased servant of God Hegumen Daniel!"

The Criminal Investigation Division of Russia's Investigative Committee opened a criminal case under part 1 of article 105 of the Criminal Code of Russia (murder). Shortly after, on July 10, 2016 the police detained the murderer, as pravda.ru reports.

As noted by the police, the arrest did not raise any difficulties. The criminal was found walking along the highway M – 7 and made no resistance to the police.

The identity of the criminal was confirmed. The murderer is a 27-year-old Alexander Shuleshov, who was earlier suspected of committing the crime. Shuleshov is one of the novices of the monastery, where he was working as a cook. According to the parishioners, shortly before the murder he

had a conflict with the prior. The man asked Father Daniel's permission to go home. However, his request was turned down and Shuleshov may have harbored a grudge against the priest. According to the novices of the monastery, Alexander was previously convicted and appeared in the monastery about a month ago.

During the interrogation it was found out that the parishioners' assumptions were absolutely correct. Shuleshov killed abbot Daniel because he didn't let him out of the monastery – the priest feared that the novice would again fall under the influence of his old friends. Father Daniel helped him put an end to his criminal past.

After committing the crime the men left the monastery. The criminal was carrying a backpack with all the necessary things for staying overnight in the woods.

The murderer was taken into custody and is waiting for preventive measures.

Sources

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/95160.html>

<http://tass.ru/proisshestviya/3438294>

Ten camouflage men were involved in another provocation of the "Right Sector" against the UOC (UKRAINE)

August 21, 2016 - In Ternopol city representatives of the "Right Sector" undertook another provocation, aimed at stirring up hatred towards the clergy and faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, as reports UOJ.

Like it was several weeks earlier, members of this nationalist organization disseminated false information about the Church through leaflets with traditional accusations towards

the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. At the same time, “calling Ukrainians to pray for the creation of One Ukrainian Local Church”, the agitators carried out their provocative action during the Divine Liturgy near the city’s cathedral.

On the following day the “Right Sector” site placed the information that allegedly “the absolute majority of Ternopol citizens welcomed our action.” Reportedly, the leaflet distribution action lasted in fact for three hours, and despite the preliminary advertising campaign, managed to gather as many as ten men in camouflage. According to eye-witnesses’ accounts, the action did not arouse a particular interest with passers-by.

As a reminder, a provocative activity on hatred escalation in the Ukrainian society is carried out, as the radicals admit themselves, “across Ukraine in various forms.”

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/ten-camouflage-men-were-involved-in-another-provocation-of-the-right-sector-against-the-uoc>

MP is sued for assaulting All Ukrainian Cross Procession (UKRAINE)

August 15, 2016 - Borispol district court considers an administrative case of deputy of Borispol City Council Yaroslav Godunok on assaults of the participants of All-Ukrainian Cross Procession, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

The case was opened under article 173 – disorderly conduct given that the deputy had used an obscene and rude language with regard to the participants of the Cross Procession for peace and law enforcers who ensured public order.

Mr. Godunok affirms the case against him is an order “from above” for his active campaign against the procession. “From the very beginning I was against this so called Cross Procession. I will not conceal the fact I did not restrain myself. In particular, I called the pilgrims to go to “Moscow”, cried “Shame”, “Get away Moscow invaders”, “Get away Moscow priests”, “Go to Putin”, the deputy commented the situation.

At the first court session the police presented records from four operative video cameras, which fixed insulting cries “Shame”, “to Moscow” etc.

The third hearing of the court is scheduled for 18 August 2016. There is some preliminary information they are going to listen to the activists who had blocked the road together with Yaroslav Godunok to bar the pilgrims from entering Borispol.

Recall, on July 25 an Eastern wing of the Cross procession passed through the crowd of nationalists. Radicals cried out outraged slogans towards the faithful, threw fresh eggs at them, and demanded to take away the National Guard that defended the participants from provocations. The law enforcers were able to push back the crowd of nationalists.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/borispol-deputy-is-tried-for-assaulting-all-ukrainian-cross-procession>

<http://orthodoxrights.org/nationalists-attempt-to-interfere-with-all-ukraine-sacred-procession.html>

UOC parishioner attacked by radicals (UKRAINE)

September 1, 2016 - Radicals in the township Ovidiopol of Odessa region beat a

priest's son, parishioner of the UOC Vasiliy Bokach. Nationalists video recorded the battery and posted it on the net. The incident occurred on August 31 during the village council session in Ovidiopol regarding the issue of the land plot allocation for building a church of the Kiev Patriarchate, as reports the union of the orthodox journalists.

As the UOJ source reports, while the nationalists were beating the man, they mostly lifted their cameras down. Tyres of Vasiy Bokach's car were pierced and the mirrors were broken. One of the leaders of local radicals Sergey Sternenko wrote on his Facebook page about the incident: "Vasya stuck the Empire's Russian Tricolor on his car. Besides, he has spoken up a lot of anti-Ukrainian things all day long today. Now Vasya feels pain all over his body, while his Lexus has problems with mirrors and wheels."

During the attack there were present police officers who, as it can be seen from the film, did not bother to intrude into goings-on. It was namely the policeman that tore a cross-depicting stick off Bokach's car – what the radicals had actually sought.

The injured man was delivered to the hospital. Battery-induced injuries were verified with the application filed to the police.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/radicals-boasted-on-the-internet-of-bashing-a-uoc-parishioner-video>

A. Reaction of the Local Orthodox Churches to the humiliation of their members, hate speeches and violence.

Orthodox priest complains to German authorities about harassment on Christians at refugee camps (GERMANY)

January 12, 2016 - Christian refugees are exposed to harassment at the refugee camps in Germany, says Hegumen Daniil (Irbits) superior of the St. George the Victorious Monastery in Gotschendorf (Moscow Patriarchate), member of the Integration Committee at the German Federal Chancellery, as reports interfax.

“Christian refugees from Syria, Eritrea and other countries are exposed to humiliation, manhunt and brutal harassment at the camps for refugees by Muslim neighbours. This also relates to the Yazidi religious minority. The cases when humiliation comes to injuries and threats of death are frequent,” the priest said in a letter to Federal Minister for Special Affairs and Head of the German Federal Chancellery Peter Altmaier, the copy of which is posted on father Daniil’s page in the social network.

Sources

<https://www.facebook.com/irbits/posts/10208796449932382>

Acts of violation against Orthodox believers (UKRAINE)

January 9, 2016 - In the village of Ptichia, Rivne region (Ukraine), the supporters of the so-called “Kiev Patriarchate” attacked to the pilgrims of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church and beat them. The Union

of Orthodox Journalists was witnesses of the incident, as they report on its official website.

The conflict between the believers of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the supporters of the so-called “Kiev Patriarchate” began the night before, after the arrival of a bus with pilgrims from Kiev.

According to witnesses, the drunken dissenters began to insult visitors and threatened them with violence. Drunken men tried to beat the police officers. On 9th January, in the morning, at the time of the procession, organized by pilgrims from Kiev, the supporters of “Kiev Patriarchate” beat the believers. A pilgrim, whose name is Gorchuk Irina, was attacked and beaten. The victim was hospitalized. Police officers arrived and they are examining the witnesses.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/posledovateli-kiyevskogo-patriarkhata-vnov-prolili-krov-veruyushchikh-upts>

Patriarch Kirill invites Greek-Catholics of Ukraine to abandon hate speech (UKRAINE)

February 24, 2016 - Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia has expressed regret at the negative reaction from representatives of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church to his and the Pope’s joint declaration, as the website Interfax-Religion reports.

“I am very frustrated by the negative reaction in Ukraine because this declaration

also gives a chance for dialogue with the Greek Catholics. If they operate within the paradigm outlined by this declaration, this is the foundation for normalization of the relations,” the patriarch told Russian reporters at the Brazilian city of San Paulo at the end of his Latin America tour on Saturday. “And instead of rejecting it at once, straight away, talking about the aggressor church, about having no fratricidal war, instead of using political cliches, they should think and say: stop, stop, stop, it is opening a chance for us. But apparently, this is not the way people there are reasoning now,” he said.

Having pointed out that even the most radical nationalist forces in Ukraine call for a united Ukraine, the patriarch stated that persecutions and violence is not the way to bring people together. He drew parallels with marriage, stressing that it cannot be preserved through conflict and incitement of hatred.

“If you want to consolidate any group of people, you must find the right language, you must take each other’s interests into account. Only by using this method that one can build a united Ukraine. This is the position of the Moscow Patriarchate, the Roman Catholic Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church,” the patriarch said.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12783>

Representative of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church spoke about violations of the rights of Orthodox believers (UKRAINE)

February 3, 2016 - With the blessing of His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufriy of Kyiv

and all Ukraine, Deputy Chairman of the Department for external Church relations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (DECUR UOC) Archpriest Mykolay Danylevych took part in the meeting of the Public Council for cooperation with religious organizations to the Ministry of foreign affairs of Ukraine, as the official website of DECUR of the UOC reports.

During the meeting, those present familiarized themselves with international events that had taken place since the previous meeting of the Public Council which involved the participation of various church and religious organizations. Also heard were reports of manifestations of religious intolerance towards the communities of certain confessions in Crimea and Donbas.

Archpriest Mykolay Danylevych emphasized the need that particular attention be paid to the numerous violations of the rights of believers and communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in some regions of Ukraine: forced seizures of churches, inaction by some local authorities, noncompliance of court rulings with regards to the protection of the rights of believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. It is imperative that special attention be given to these issues, especially since the above given facts are the areas of prime concern for international human rights organizations.

In particular it should be recalled that on January 30, 2016 representatives of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission which was deployed in the city of Kremenets, Ternopil region during a series of meetings familiarized themselves with materials evidencing the violation of the rights of believers of the UOC in Ternopil region.

Sources

<http://vzcz.church.ua/en/2016/02/08/uoc-representative-takes-part-in-fourth-meeting-of-the-public-council-at-the-mfa-of-ukraine/>

Communique of the Albanian Orthodox Church concerning the Hate Speech of a newspaper against the Orthodox Archbishop of Albania (ALBANIA)

March 1, 2016 - The Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania published a communique as an answer to the Albanian newspaper “Gazeta Shqiptare”, as the website of the Albanian Orthodox Church reports.

“Each new press release of Mr. Nikolla Marku and of the group of people which motivates him, is as much delirious in kind as the previous statements made by him. In his last statement, which was published in your newspaper (“Gazeta Shqiptare”, 2.23.2016) and broadcasted by several television channels, he goes so far as to require the review of the Constitution, the repeal of a law and declares also that he would even make an appeal to The Hague court. In a shameless way and without possessing the slightest evidence, he slanders against the Orthodox Archbishop, who according to him is “a representative of Northern Epirus Chauvinism” and who even cooperates with a Greek extremist nationalist party. But, throughout Greece and in most of Albania as well as in the entire Christian world, people know that Archbishop Anastasios belongs to those people who work on the front lines to preserve peace and mutual respect between peoples and nations. Therefore, he has been chosen for senior posts in global Christian bodies and elected as Honorary President of the Interfaith Peace Conference: “Religions for Peace”.

Any wise reader can immediately understand the poor level of Mr. Nikolla Marku’s statements and allegations. But the authors of his declarations, who follow the method “Slander, slander (over and over again), because something will remain at the end,” even if nothing at all gets done, aim to bring into circulation the intended rumors at the expense of our Church. (It is worth-noting at this point that such attacks are not made against any other religious community in Albania).

The Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania is the only officially recognized church by the Albanian state; it is one of the 14 Autocephalous Orthodox Churches of the world, which maintains excellent relations with the Catholic Church and all member churches of the World Council of Churches.

But who are the authors of the text published on February 22, 2016 by some committee of Elbasan? Although we have repeatedly exposed the real face of such unscrupulous slanderers, several suspicious circles still continue to support them, in spite of the revealed unquestionable facts. In summary, we emphasize the following:

1. Mr. Nikolla Marku: He has no connection with the Orthodox Church of Albania recognized by the State or with any other Orthodox Churches. The relations between the Orthodox Church and the State are firmly regulated by Law Nr 10 057 / 01.22.2009, in “The Agreement between the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania and the Albanian Orthodox Church ...”, as drafted under the prerogative dictated by the Albanian Constitution. No Church in the world (Catholic, Anglican, Evangelical, or Pentecostal) recognizes him as an Orthodox clergyman.

2. “The Committee for the protection of independence of the national independent Orthodox Church of Albania”, whose chairman pleads to be as such, is not a “Church” or a religious community in the sense given by the Constitution. It is only a neighborhood committee of a city which is not recognized as “a religious community”. And, to mislead the public opinion even more, he subtly uses as a seal of his own the following title “The National Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in the Castle area in Elbasan”. Obviously we are facing a tremendous fraud and delusion. Fortunately, in the law mentioned above (10 057 / 22.01.2009, article 5, paragraph. 1), it is explicitly stated that: “The State respects the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania and recognizes as its representatives only the persons authorized by the Holy Synod of the Church and it guarantees the protection of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania by any persons or groups that claim the church name, its cult objects, properties, symbols or seal”.

Such a continuous deception of the public by irrelevant people or groups, which has been repeatedly confirmed, is in fact an awkward way of spiritual corruption, that continuously tries to poison the religious harmony, for which Albania has always boasted.

Sources

<http://orthodoxalbania.org/alb/index.php/en-us/lajme-3/blog/3773-an-answer-to-a-shameless-slander>

Orthodox Bishop denounces hate speech (UKRAINE)

April 6, 2016 - Archbishop of Severodonetsk and Starobelsk Nikodim in his interview on the official website of the Severodentsk

diocese stresses that “hate speech” is unacceptable in calls for reconciliation. He also speaks about peace and patriotism as well as how to properly take up Lent.

“Christians take up Lent to rise up to the Savior, to become better, and thus to be kinder, more merciful and considerate to their near and dear ones, as in everyday life we become slaves of worries, vanity and habits. Fasting helps to escape from this captivity. We purify the body through abstinence from food, and the soul – through prayer and virtues,” the bishop said.

As to the hostilities in the East and whether repentance and forgiveness make a difference and can bring people together, the archbishop said that, of course, thousands of people killed cannot be revived. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church prays for their souls, but there is nothing irreversible. “All wars come to an end eventually. And when these hostilities cease can be affected. I think that not only the Orthodox Christians in the east of Ukraine, but also all over the country, in their prayer ask the Lord to lay mercy, to stop the confrontation and bloodshed. We often hear the question, “Why God does not send us peace, as we pray without ceasing?” God hears our prayers, but we ourselves have to work hard: to repent of our sins, because it is a request for salvation and ability to forgive. God commanded us to forgive,” said the archbishop.

Regarding provocations on the part of the Kiev Patriarchate, Archbishop Nikodim put it categorically, “You cannot call for reconciliation using “hate speech”, which we often see and hear from the clergy of the so-called “Kiev Patriarchate”. The priest must spread the word of Jesus, and not turn his sermons in a lecture about the socio-political life of the country, blaming the canonical

Church for all the troubles. Such activities (exactly activities, not the service) cannot definitely be called peacemaking.”

The bishop stressed that the schismatics, with the support of certain political forces and paramilitary groups, commit offences in the western regions, organizing seizures of churches. And even the most unbending parishioners, who are trying to protect their shrines, are helpless in an unequal confrontation. “We all understand that any voluntary transition of believers into the so-called “Kiev Patriarchate” is out of the question. However, churches are being seized, and such cases often go unpunished,” said the bishop. Regarding the service in the Diocese of Severodonetsk and Starobelsk, on the territory administratively uncontrolled by Ukraine, and difficulties which may arise due to this, the archbishop remarked, “The diocese entrusted to me is a single whole. I always say that we cannot divide believers into “us” and “them”. No matter how complex the political situation is, canonical and prayerful unity is preserved, Faith unites and reconciles us.”

In the conclusion, the archbishop wished all the fasting to feel the joy, quiet and deep, purify their mind from the hustle and do good to adequately prepare for the celebration of the celebrations – Easter Sunday.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/zashchita-tserkvi/archbishop-nikodim-baranovsky-you-cannot-call-for-reconciliation-using-hate-speech>

<http://www.sed-eparhia.com/78-novosti/1451-arkhiiepiskop-nikodim-nelzya-prizyvati-k-primireniyu-yazykom-vrazhdy.html>

Bishop Clement (Vecheria): Law enforcers should deal with officials provoking inter-religious crisis (UKRAINE)

July 12, 2016 - Intelligence agencies should examine the statement of Andrei Parubiy, the speaker of the Ukrainian Parliament, about possible provocations during the cross procession, said in his interview to the channel “112 Ukraine” the Head of the Information and Education Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Bishop Clement, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

“The official reaction must not be just as a sign that the UOC does not accept and condemns such statements of Ukrainian politicians, but we have special services and authorities in Ukraine that should keep track of such statements of the politicians who incite inter-religious enmity, whose activities are threatening to further fuel existing sensitivities and to further destabilize the present tense and fragile situation in the country. Those special services and authorities should address the statement of Parubiy,” said Bishop Clemens.

“I think his statement today completely complies with all the articles of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, which allows the law enforcement to stop all attempts to foment sectarian strife and discrimination of citizens of Ukraine on the religious ground,” concluded the Bishop.

Recall, on July 11, speaker of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine Andrei Parubiy said that the Russian government is preparing a provocation during the All-Ukrainian cross procession in Kiev. Parubiy stressed that not only civilians but also provocateurs with the banned symbols and symbols of

the aggressor-country are heading for the Ukrainian capital.

Sources

<http://ua.112.ua/suspilstvo/v-upts-mp-vvazhaiut-shcho-spetssluzhby-povynni-vyvchyty-zaiavu-parubiia-pro-mozhlyvi-provokatsii-pid-chas-khresnoho-khodu-324163.html>

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/nasushchnyj-vopros/bishop-clement-vecheria-law-enforcers-should-deal-with-officials-provoking-inter-religious-crisis>

Chapter 3 : Violations of the freedom of expression of Orthodox believers.

Orthodox Bishop protests for retaliatory actions the day of Epiphany (GREECE)

January 6, 2016 - For the first time, the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation did not broadcast the Liturgy of Epiphany in the port of Piraeus (Greece), as the website romfea reports. This day in Greece, the centre of the feast is the Diocese of Piraeus because there is held every year the blessing of water in the sea with the presence of the President of the Hellenic Republic, the Prime Minister of the Greek State, the Archbishop of Greece, Ministers and Deputies.

This year for the first time, no one was present in the ceremony and the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation did not broadcast the Liturgy of Epiphany, because the Prime Minister was very discomfort with Bishop Seraphim, who disagreed strongly against the new law for same-sex marriages.

Bishop Seraphim accused the government for vindictiveness, spiteful and fascist manners. According to his statement, the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation belongs to Greek people and not to the government, which interfered in order to prevent the broadcasting of the ceremony.

Sources

<http://www.romfea.gr/ieres-mitropoleis/5668-peiraios-serafeim-i-kubernisi-pasxei-apo-ozousa-fasizousa-nootropia>

Kiev Patriarchate tries to legitimize the seizure of an Orthodox church (UKRAINE)

January 6, 2016 - Representatives of the so-called Kiev Patriarchate try to legitimize the capture of a church in the village Kolodyanka Zhytomyr region (Ukraine), as the website prochurch.ua reports.

Representatives of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the so-called Kiev Patriarchate supporters met with the head of Novograd Volyn regional Administration, to discuss the situation. The non-canonical believers insist on claiming the ownership of the temple. However, no member of the UOC community in the village Kolodyanka moved to Kiev Patriarchate, as Archpriest Valentin said.

“During the time of the capture the community was never registered to them. Actually, in Novograd in Volyn region are only two schismatic communities. Both are located in the district centre”.

According to the Archpriest of the UOC, everything started when members of the Kiev Patriarchate in Novograd of Volyn took with their side the head of the village council and the school director, as supporters. Those people helped to seize the church.

“Now they are trying to establish some kind of parish life and to create an active community”, said archpriest Valentin.

Archpriest Valentin Moroz believes that the representatives of the so-called Kiev Patriarchate took advantage that the

canonical Church had some difficulties with the documents and the funds concerning the construction of the church.

The UOC community consult a lawyer trying to defend their rights and it prepares documents for its property.

Sources

<http://pro.church.ua/2016/01/06/kijivskij-patriarxat-namagajetsya-uzakoniti-zaxoplennya-xramu-upc-u-seli-kolodyanka/>

Believers were prevented from exercising their right on praying (UKRAINE)

January 3, 2016 - In Ternopil (Ukraine) representatives of the so-called Kiev Patriarchate blocked once again the entrance of the temple of the Holy Righteous Anna and believers of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (OUC) were not allowed to worship, as the website prochurch.ua reports.

In the morning before the service, the supporters of Kiev Patriarchate occupied the territory at the gate of the temple. They demanded the consent of the UOC community to “alternate” service.

“The supporters of Kiev Patriarchate said that if we did not agree on this, they will not let us entering into the temple”, says Nikolay Voznyuk.

The perpetrators refused the suggestion of the believers of the Canonical Church to help them construct their own temple for their needs.

“They require at once a cash compensation of 2.5 million, by claiming that they participated in the construction of the previous church,

whose cost is estimated at 5 million,” said a representative of the UOC community.

The newly established community of the so-called Kiev Patriarchate tries through local authorities to achieve the admission to the “alternate” worship in the temple of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which legally belongs to the community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Sources

<http://pro.church.ua/2016/01/03/u-seli-kuti-kijivskij-patriarxat-znovu-blokuje-xram-upc/>

Interdiction of Orthodox Metropolitan to visit a school after invitation (GREECE)

February 28, 2016 - Under the decision of the Greek Ministry of education, Metropolitan of Mesogea and Lavreotiki, Nikolaos, wasn't allowed to give a conference at a college in Salonika, where he was invited by the students, as the website romfea reports.

Metropolitan of Salonika confirmed the incident which happened in his jurisdiction. He said that Metropolitan Nikolaos went to the college for the conference and the teachers told him that according to the order of the Greek Ministry of Education you are not allowed to discuss with students and give the conference.

Metropolitan of Salonika, Anthimos commented that this is a kind of persecution of the Church. The order of the Greek Minister, Mr. Filis, was addressed at all schools and colleges to check if any Metropolitan spoke. No Metropolitan is allowed to speak in schools.

Metropolitan Nikolaos said that “the State is dreaming an education without freedom

and a society without democracy. I don't speak about the right of a bishop to go to a school and discuss. I speak about the right of students to discuss with the Church. Those who made propaganda about the anti-racist law, they have a passion against the Church”.

Sources

<http://www.romfea.gr/diafora/6683-anthimos-i-apagoreusi-tou-mesogaias-deixnei-oti-arxise-o-diogmos>

Prohibition to an Orthodox bishop to visit schools for educative reasons (GREECE)

February 24, 2016 - The associations of teachers and professors of schools in Nea Ionia (Athens, Greece), rejected the visits of Metropolitan and the priests in schools during the religious course in order to discuss with students, as the official website of the diocese reports.

Metropolitan of Nea Ionia and Philadelphia, Gabriel commented: “I am deeply sorry that in 2016, in our homeland, the priests are rejected from the public education. I am sorry because some people underestimate on purpose the huge contribution of the Orthodox Church to our nation during its history and the fact that the majority of citizens of this country are Orthodox”.

Sources

<http://www.nif.gr/anakoinoseis/dilosi-sebasmiotatou-gia-tis-episkepseis-tou-se-sxoleia/>

Religious confrontation in Ukraine (UKRAINE)

March 31, 2016 - A new bill, registered in the parliament, can not only legalize church raiding, but also provoke sectarian conflicts,

it says in the UOC, as the website segodnya reports.

A group of deputies of the Verkhovna Rada registered a draft bill aimed at amending the regulation of the activities of religious organizations. Legislative act № 4128 “On Amendments to the Law of Ukraine “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” “provides the definition of procedure of changing affiliation of religious communities with religious centers operating in Ukraine and outside it. In the explanatory note to the bill, the authors state that the legislative act will ensure the right of religious communities to a conscious choice and freedom to change affiliation with a particular religious center. However, representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) express concern: in their opinion, the legislative act will help legalize raider seizure of the UOC churches and even incite inter-confessional strife.

The right of every citizen of Ukraine to freedom of personal philosophy and religion is guaranteed by Art. 35 of the Constitution of Ukraine, and Art. 8 of the Law of Ukraine “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” provides a possibility for religious communities to freely change their affiliation with a religious center.

At the same time, the authors of bill № 4128 claim that the procedure of changing affiliation is not regulated in Ukraine on the legislative level, which makes it difficult to ensure the believers a free religious choice. In this regard, a group of deputies made a proposal to amend the law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations”. In particular, these changes provide that affiliation of every person with a particular religious community is based on their self-identification with this community, which is

proved by their participation in the religious life of the particular community.

If a religious community wants to change affiliation, then amendments to the Law will make this possible on the basis of the consent of the majority of members of the religious community present at the parish meeting.

However, the Central Scientific Experts Office has made a number of comments on this initiative and recommended it be rejected. The experts stressed that the Constitution provides for the intervention of the state in religious activity only in the case of the protection of public order, health and morality of the population, or the rights and freedoms of others. In the opinion of the experts of the office, there is reason to believe that the issue is not subject to legislative control.

In addition, the experts emphasize that any amendments or additions to the statute of a religious community are taken in a parish council of the faithful citizens, rather than “at the meeting of citizens”, as proposed in the draft bill. Moreover, in the comments the opinion is expressed that the number of citizens at the meeting of a religious community can be much smaller than the total number of community members. So to decide whether to change affiliation by a simple majority is counterproductive.

The experts also emphasize the concepts of “self-identity” and “religious life” are not clearly defined in the legislation.

The UOC representatives strongly objected to the draft legislation, “This legislative initiative is an attempt to legitimize raider seizure of churches, which, unfortunately, are recorded in certain regions of Ukraine, in particular, in certain regions of Western Ukraine”,

stated in a press conference the head of the Information and Education Department of the UOC, Bishop of Irpen Clement (Vecheria).

The bishop considers the bill discriminatory to people who have certain religious beliefs. The priest stressed that the bill will provoke a reduction in the religious communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. To date, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is the largest religious organization in Ukraine, it is composed of more than 12 thousand religious communities, and it is millions of citizens.

As was emphasized by the head of the legal department of the UOC Archpriest Alexander Bach, since 2014 representatives of the “Kiev Patriarchate” and authorities have permanently taken actions to seize churches belonging to the UOC.

“During this period, 31 seizures of the UOC churches are recorded, 12 are under threat of seizure, 8 changed their affiliation in accordance with the Law of Ukraine “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations. Moreover, these seizures are passed off as a voluntary transition of believers,” says the priest.

In addition, cases of church raiding have repeatedly occurred in Ukraine, so far only in three regions – Ternopil, Rivne and Volyn, – said Bishop Clement. – And frequently – with physical violence. Thus, the internal affairs authorities have already instituted about 25 criminal cases on the basis of such events.

The bill wording is also of concern with the UOC. Archpriest Alexander Bach pointed out that the proposed draft legislation contains a number of inaccuracies in the

conceptual apparatus, namely, the concept of “self-identity”. According to UOC officials, the term and other amendments to the law will entitle persons who are not members of a given religious community to, via unilateral declaration, state that they are indeed part of a certain community, and thereafter can influence decisions made at the parish meeting of a certain religious community concerning change in jurisdiction.

“However, we must also be aware, that the effect of these laws will be felt by all religious organizations throughout Ukraine. If today the bill is directed primarily against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, then tomorrow, with similar objectives in mind, this legislation can also be used against communities belonging to other confessions and religious organizations”, stated Bishop of Irpen Clement.

It must be said that discrimination occurs not only through legislative initiatives. The bishop expressed concern that the Department on Religions and Nationalities at the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine is stalling or not even bothering to register the statutes of new dioceses, monasteries and parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to falsify statistics to create the impression that the UOC is being reduced. Moreover, the Ministry officials won't provide any comment on it.

It is to be recalled that one of the major conflicts broke out on September 21, 2015 in the village of Katerynivka, Ternopil region. Then there was a fight between the Orthodox believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, who served an open-air liturgy near the barricaded church of St. George the Victorious, and supporters of the “Kiev Patriarchate”.

As a result, the unknown got into the church through the side door and broke the front door. After that the religious building was occupied by representatives of the “Kiev Patriarchate”. The UOC believers could not get into the church because, as they said, they were prevented by young people with stripes “Right sector”. The developments were watched by the local units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Sources

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<https://mospat.ru/ru/2017/01/13/news141083/>

<https://mospat.ru/en/2017/01/13/news141083/>

http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/nagnetanie-nenavisti-protiv-upts-prevratilos-v-propagandu-monitoring-prav-cheloveka-v-ukraine?sphrase_id=25891

Draft bills in Bulgaria to change the law for religions (BULGARIA)

March 30, 2016 - Two draft bills tabled in Bulgaria's Parliament by opposition socialist MPs to amend the law on religious denominations – including provisions that would limit the activities of foreign clerics – are causing controversy, with critics condemning the bills as an assault on religious freedom, as the website *sofiaglobe* reports.

One bill was tabled on March 1 by Georgi Kadiev, an MP formerly with the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), and other amendments were tabled two weeks later by BSP MPs including Vassil Antonov, deputy head of the parliamentary committee on religious affairs.

The two bills have several similarities, giving the appearance of Kadiev's former party trying to outdo him.

Kadiev's bill provides for tighter state control over religious groups and expands the power of the religious affairs directorate at the Cabinet office. Employees of religious groups would have to monitor revenue from donations, including a requirement for declarations of the sources of the money.

If approved, the bill would outlaw employees of religious groups and teachers in religious schools being people who received religious education at institutions other than those approved by the religious affairs directorate.

Arguably most controversially, worship, rites and rituals in Bulgaria could be performed only by Bulgarian or European Union citizens. Citizens of non-EU countries could preside at worship in Bulgaria only with permission, and for no more than three months in a calendar year – a provision that would affect, among many others, citizens of the United States, Russia, Turkey and Middle Eastern countries.

In Kadiev's bill, all donations equal to or greater than 420 leva (the current legal minimum wage in Bulgaria, equivalent to about 215 euro) would have to be declared in a register submitted to the religious affairs directorate. Failure to declare or update the list of donors within 14 days of the receipt of a donation would mean a fine of 3000 to 5000 leva, rising to 5000 to 20 000 leva in the case of a second or further offence.

In an explanatory memorandum appended to the bill, Kadiev said that the bill increased the level of transparency about funding religious activities.

The bill was based on the notion that no matter what the faith, religious activities in the country "should for the most part be

carried out by Bulgarian citizens and aimed at Bulgarian citizens".

Kadiev said that the bill increased the powers of the religious affairs directorate, transforming it from simply a body recording the activities of religious groups, to enable it "in case it notices worrying trends, to signal and provide the necessary information to the authorities responsible for financial transparency and security in the country".

The bill, he said, provides for religious communities in Bulgaria to avoid being dependent on foreign funding, "which would place doubt on the independence of the actions of the clergy". The BSP's bill, tabled on March 14, said that updates were necessary because the Religious Denominations Act of 2002 had "gaps and deficiencies".

There were new circumstances including, according to the BSP sponsors of the amendments, an influx of "foreign religions" (considering that Judaism, Christianity and Islam all arose in the Middle East, it was not immediately obvious which religions the BSP might consider as indigenous to Bulgaria), the preaching of dubious religious teachings, the preaching of radical Islam and the entry of foreign religions not registered in the country "and their rituals, customs and specifics are not only alien to Bulgarians, but also are gross interference in the domestic peace in the country and are a threat to national security".

Faith groups not registered by the court would be banned by law from holding meetings, setting up or maintaining charitable or humanitarian institutions and "writing, issuing or disseminating" religious publications. They also would be banned from setting up institutions to collect and receive donations.

Religions also would be required to provide information on the grants they receive, property and other fundraising activities, in detail.

In an interview with Bulgarian-language media, the BSP's Antonov said that, "we must recognise the realities, we live in times when faith turns into fanaticism that kills innocent people".

The bill introduced additional safeguards to protect national security, including through the strict regulation that citizens of countries outside the EU could perform religious rites in the country only as an exception.

The problems with the current law was that it was "too liberal," Antonov said. It failed, he said, to set an explicit requirement for the number of members of a religious community for it to acquire the status of a religion.

"Very often, an application for registration is filed by a new religious division of an already-registered religious community. Such examples exist in (the towns of) Sliven, Shoumen, Lovech and Stara Zagora. It has got to the paradox where there now exist seven Baptist denominations registered at one address," Antonov said.

He denied that the amendments ran against Bulgaria's constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion. "Their goal is to create regulation regarding the terms and conditions of registration of emerging religions, and hence to ensure the state's role in observing the human rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens."

Antonov called on other parties represented in Parliament – where the BSP is the second-largest, by some distance, party – to support the amendments.

The Kadiev and BSP bills came under stinging attack on the *svobodazavseki* (freedom for all) website, with protest declarations saying that if approved, the bill would be the end of religious freedom in Bulgaria.

"If the bill becomes law, the Christian church will need to go underground in order to function as such," the declaration said.

It said that the bill was the "worst of all previous attempts over the years" to restore a Marxist-Leninist attitude towards Christianity and freedom of religion. It added that the bill was unconstitutional.

The declaration said that the bill would prohibit faith in God and preaching without state registration, would limit donations to churches and ban funding from foreign sources, ban worship by citizens of non-EU countries ("including the US, Australia and other friendly countries) and, among other objections, "Christians would not be able to preach and criticise the 'socio-economic order or social norms and relationships' in the country, nor make any political comments".

In Bulgaria, a large majority of the population declare themselves to be Bulgarian Orthodox Christians. Among Christians in the country, there is a small Protestant minority – about 64 400 out of a population of 7.1 million people – and an even smaller Roman Catholic minority, of just less than 49 000, if the 2011 census figures are correct.

Sources

<http://sofiaglobe.com/2016/03/30/proposed-changes-to-laws-on-religions-in-bulgaria-spark-ire/>

A bill on transfer of religious communities to another jurisdiction presented in Ukrainian Parliament (UKRAINE)

March 1, 2016 - Amendments to the Law of Ukraine “On freedom of conscience and religious organizations” relating to the change of affiliation with religious centers by religious communities were brought in the Ukrainian Parliament, as the website risu.org.ua reports.

The initiators of the bill No. 4128 were by Victor Yelensky, Svitlana Voitsekhovska, Pavlo Kyshkar and four more MPs, the Institute of Religious Freedom reports.

According to the authors, the bill is designed “to enforce the rights of members of religious communities to informed choice and free and unimpeded change of affiliation with religious centers for satisfying their religious needs and dignified expression of religious feelings.” The proposed changes are intended to “regulate the procedure of changing affiliation of the religious communities and religious centers (leadership) operating in Ukraine and abroad.”

This initiative has provoked criticism of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), whose representative expressed concern about using these changes to simplify the transfer of churches in the course of transitions of Orthodox communities from the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate to that of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kyiv Patriarchate.

“In practice, it will look as follows, the general meeting of faithful (parish meeting) will be attended by other persons who do not belong to the religious community, but nevertheless will have the right to vote

and will be entitled to adopt or amend the statute of the religious community,” said Rev Alexander Bakhov, head of the UOC Synodal Legal Department.

On the other hand, according to IRS experts, difficulties may arise in the activities of religious communities, the statutes of which stipulate fixed membership, particularly in Protestant (evangelical) churches or which delegate the right to amend the statute to other governing bodies – the Parish Council, the Council of Elders, a brotherhood council.

“As an example, the decision of a religious community to change denomination will not be adopted by the general meeting of its members, but by third persons, who used to visit public service or visited it on occasion. The result may be a situation where the registration authorities will have to decide whether to take note of the decision taken in accordance with the Statute of the registered religious community or the one adopted in accordance with legislative amendments. Courts could face a similar problem,” said lawyer Maksym Vasin, Executive Director of the Institute for Religious Freedom, a member of the Expert Council of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine.

As the IRS notes, the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in the case “St. Michael Parish v. Ukraine” (Application No. 77703/01) states:

“The Court recalls that religious groups have the right to determine at their discretion the manner in which they will accept the new and exclude the existing members. The internal structure of religious organizations and rules governing its membership should be seen as the way in which such organizations may express their views and observe their religious traditions. The Court

indicates that the right to freedom of religion excludes any powers of the state to assess the legitimacy of the ways of expressing religious beliefs.”

Currently, bill No. 4128 is pending consideration of the Parliamentary Committee on Culture and Spirituality.

Sources

http://risu.org.ua/en/index/all_news/state/legislation/62672/

The Turkish State opens a case to recover the lands returned to the Orthodox Patriarchate in recent years (TURKEY)

April 21, 2016 - Turkey has opened a case against the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, to cancel the legal acts with which some land were returned to the Orthodox Patriarchal See, in compliance with the laws providing restitution to the minority religious communities of goods seized in the past by the Turkish authorities. This was reported by local sources, consulted by Agenzia Fides.

In particular, the intent is to re-expropriate the Ecumenical Patriarchate of a plot of 98 acres (approximately 40 hectares) in the Goksu area, and another area in Umit Tepesi, adjacent the Institute of Orthodox theology in Halki. The procedural initiative is yet another case of harassment for legal and administrative channels implemented by the Turkish institutions against the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Sources

http://www.fides.org/en/news/59876-ASIA_TURKEY_The_Turkish_State_opens_a_case_to_recover_the_lands_returned_to_the_Ecumenical_Patriarchate_in_recent_years#.Vx1nkKNwnJs

Campaign to kick out the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) from Kyiv Pechersk Lavra initialized (UKRAINE)

July 10, 2016 - An ex – head of the department for drug-related crime prevention, National police of Ukraine, Ilya Kiva plans to initiate the creation of a movement for transmission of Pechersk Lavra from the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), as Observer reports.

The corresponding entry was published on his page on Facebook on July 10.

“Today when I was coming out of the church I felt the urge to free Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra from Moscow FSB agents in cassocks who captured and raped the monastery and to return the shrine to Ukrainians. I am sure that with the release and return of Lavra the revival and liberation of Ukrainian land will begin,” – writes Kiva.

“I will initiate the creation of a civil movement to return the shrine to Ukraine. Join me!”, – he added.

According to the “Observer“, the church historian Arsen Zinchenko explained why Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra should belong to Ukraine. He believes that Kyiv – Pechersk Lavra, as well as other Orthodox shrines of Ukraine should be “in the bowels of the Ukrainian Church.”

Responding to the question of “Observer” on what might be the fate of Kyiv – Pechersk Lavra after autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the expert said: “It is an ancient Ukrainian shrine – just like Pochayiv Lavra and it shall be in the depths of the Ukrainian Church.”

Sources

<http://obozrevatel.com/politics/52791-pochuvstvoval-zhelanie-kiva-sobralysya-vyignat-upts-mp-iz-pecherskoj-lavryi.htm>

<http://obozrevatel.com/society/24970-v-nedrah-tserkvi-ekspert-zayavil-chto-kievo-pecherskaya-lavra-dolzha-prinadlezhat-ukraine.htm>

National Rada banned Orthodox TV channel “Union” (UKRAINE)

July 7, 2016 - The National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio decided to amend the List of foreign programs permitted for broadcast on the territory of Ukraine. 9 Russian channel programs were excluded from the list, including Orthodox channel “Union”, when American erotic channel “Penthouse HD” was included, as the Union of Orthodox Journalists reports.

According to the information posted on the National Council website, channels like “Child’s Smile”, “Psychology 21”, “Hunting and Fishing”, the Orthodox TV “Union”, “Amazing Life”, “Look TV”, “Mini- movie”, “Really funny TV” and “Footschool TV” were also banned.

“On these TV channels commercial advertising was broadcasted, which is a violation of the requirements of part 9 article 13 of the law of Ukraine “On advertising”, – is said in a statement.

The reason for prohibition of the Orthodox TV channel “Union ” was that it “has signs of a call for overthrow of the constitutional system and violation of territorial integrity of Ukraine, as it recognizes the existence of an unrecognized entity on the territory of Ukraine and thus is the form of its promotion in the media of the state – aggressor”.

The National Rada also examined an “appeal

of Penthouse Global Media Inc., California, USA, whether the content of the foreign program “Penthouse HD” conforms to the European Convention. The monitoring conducted by the National Council revealed that this channel had erotic content. The volume of broadcasting – 24 hours a day, the program language – English; advertising and other commercial information is not available; during the broadcast age classification mark of video is not used. In compliance with the requirements of Article 13 of the Law of Ukraine “On Protection of Public Morality” broadcast of “Penthouse HD” is allowed from 24 P.M. to 4:00 A.M. In this respect the decision of the National Council shall enter into force on the day of its publication,”- as reported in the decision of the regulatory authority.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/natsrada-zapretila-pravoslavnyy-telekanal-soyuz-i-razreshila-amerikanskiy-eroticheskiy-kanal>

A. Reaction of the local Orthodox Churches to the Violations of the freedom of expression of Orthodox believers.

Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture has difficulties to be introduced in Tatarstan's schools (RUSSIA)

February 10, 2016 - the metropolitan of Tatarstan and Kazan Theophanes stated that it proves quite “difficult” to introduce the subject “Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture” (FOC) in the curriculum in Tatarstan, as reports sedmitza.ru. “It is a complicated question and I wouldn't like to cross swords over challenging issues” – he said during the press conference at the diocesan office. He added that “the church is working on this issue”. “I think that if we avoid clashes and conduct a peaceful dialog with the regional authorities, we will be able to reach the desired compromise” he emphasized.

Currently within the framework of the course “Fundamentals of religious culture and secular ethics”, 4th form students of Tatarstan primary schools are taught only two modules from the six possible, namely “Fundamentals of secular ethics” and “Fundamentals of world religious cultures”. Neither “Fundamentals of Islamic culture” nor FOC is included. Public officials explain that this is the “free choice” of parents, that people “are conscious of the significance of this issue” and therefore “advocate” that children must not be segregated by their religious affiliation. Last year however, Patriarch Kirill accused the Tatarstan authorities of violation of rights of orthodox Christians referring to the Republic as “the unique” region (for FOC courses are provided even in Chechen Republic, though

the rate of orthodox representatives there is significantly lower). He declared that the Church will make every effort “to overcome this unhealthy situation”.

Sources

<http://www.sedmitza.ru/text/6175053.html>

Albanian Orthodox Archbishop Anastasius speaks about the continuous persecution of the Albanian Orthodox Church (ALBANIA)

February 5, 2016 - Archbishop Anastasius gave an interview and explained the situation in his Local Church, as the website agionoros reports.

Today, the Orthodox Church of Albania is still persecuted by the authorities “which they have not yet returned the shrines, including many monasteries.” According to the archbishop, “it is not a matter of political authorities to determine what is sacred and what is not.”

The Primate of the Albanian Orthodox Church emphasized that the Orthodox Albanian population of the country is 22 percent. The church is actively cooperating with the society and provides an extensive charity work, such as building schools, opening universities, cultural centers and hospitals. Tirana's top modern medical center offered its services for more than half of a million people, regardless of their beliefs and religious affiliation. In addition, 150 new churches have been built and 60

monasteries and churches restored.

Sources

<http://agionoros.ru/docs/2262.html>

Chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church: We are for national unity (UKRAINE)

March 25, 2016 - The chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, metropolitan Antonyi gave interview to 'Correspondent' magazine.

The wave of violent conflicts between the faithful of different patriarchates over parishes has aggravated the long-standing problem of the Ukrainian church. Most of the citizens consider themselves orthodox Christians. But which church do they identify themselves with? There are three 'orthodoxy variations' in Ukraine, says Elena Siroid in the issue 9 of 'Correspondent' magazine dated March 11, 2016.

One of them is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate (UOC) founded in 1990 as part of the Moscow Patriarchate having autonomy in administrative matters. It is the unique canonical church, i.e. officially recognized by the world orthodox community.

The second one is the Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC KP) established in 1992 and the third one is the Ukrainian Autocephalous (independent) Orthodox Church (UAOC), appeared in 1919.

The two latter emerged during crisis years obviously with the aim of distancing themselves from the Moscow Patriarchate as much as possible. Now as Ukraine is undergoing a crisis period again, will the

autocephaly issue be reconsidered?

A 'Correspondent' journalist interviewed the chancellor of the UOC, metropolitan Antonyi (Pakanich) about these and other issues.

Will the Ecumenical Council discuss the question of granting autocephalous status to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church during its session in June 2016?

The agenda of the All-Orthodox Council was mainly drawn up in 1970s. As you see the preparation process is very long. And the main principle on which it rests is that only questions concerning all orthodox churches must be discussed. This is why this particular question of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church status is not included in the project documents of the Council (already in free access). However, the situation of the Ukrainian Orthodoxy is nowadays closely followed by all orthodox churches. The fact is that aggressive actions of some Ukrainian confessions (unrecognized by the world orthodoxy) oriented towards us are unacceptable from the point of view of the church approach. We can hold a review of the letters that we get from the heads of local churches and Bishops' Councils where they express their opinions about the actual situation of our Church. For example, recently the Bishops' Council of Serbia sent a letter to the president of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko, where they express their concern about the attempts to dissolve the unique canonical Church in Ukraine. Therefore, the problem of the Ukrainian orthodoxy will be touched on anyway during the meeting of the All-Orthodox Council.

When you say unacceptable attitude, do you mean the seizures of Moscow Patriarchate

churches that are so often reported? How many similar cases have already been recorded?

31 churches were seized during the years 2014-15 and other in 12 administrative units are threatened. The seizures were armed and organized. And what worries us the most is the inaction of the authorities. In some cases, they even take the part of seizers. We are modern people and understand what religious freedom is and we are for raising legal awareness in society. Each of us has the right to choose which church to attend – if any at all. However, everything happening in the context of religion must definitely comply with legislative rules.

Do you mean that a parish has the right to freely change its confession?

Since recently, 8 parishes have consciously shifted to Kyiv Patriarchate within the juridical field. There was no debate over the inverse process either, when some Kyiv Patriarchate churches voluntarily shifted to us. According to Ukrainian Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, parishes have the right to do it.

Nevertheless, illegal seizure of the church by means of lies and force cannot be qualified as free choice. According to the law, a free shift occurs when such a decision is taken by the members of parish councils and not by village residents as there are not only orthodox among them but also followers of other Christian confessions and even non-believers. When a church is taken over by the UOC KP contrary to the will of UOC believers even if they are only ten, such an event may not be qualified as a free shift. In fact, certain politicians are dissatisfied with the actual Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, and so draft

law No. 4128 was introduced to Verkhovna Rada on February 23. Without going into details and emphasizing the non-compliance with the international legal practice, it is important to stress that these amendments are an attempt to legalize the forced seizures of our churches. It goes without saying that all these actions may only lead to confrontation and aggravate the interfaith conflicts.

Have you applied to court?

We file cases after each conflict situation if we consider that our believers' rights were violated. We have won many cases so far but local authorities do not execute the decisions. The most high-profile lawsuit in this context is the one on the seizure of the church in Pticha village of Rovenskaya region. We won lawsuits of many levels but the local authority managed to have the church and the property arrested. So the execution of the court decision is blocked.

How can you explain such an attitude? As a parishioner, I myself saw people leave the church during the liturgy when Patriarch Kirill's name was mentioned.

I would, nonetheless, say that many of our parishioners quite the opposite, follow the liturgy very attentively to be sure that nothing is omitted from the worshipping tradition, developed and approved by devout prayers of our predecessors. What is not connected to the church life must stay out of the church. Unfortunately, not everyone is able to cope with sometimes untruthful information flow, concerning the relationship of our churches in general and his sanctity the Patriarch in particular. Much of the negative information, usually without real grounds, is dispersed via mass media.

Has anyone so far produced authentic evidence of weapon stocks in parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church or of a priest refusing to perform a funeral service for a soldier fallen in anti-terrorist operations?

There are many allegations of this kind which, however, turn out to be slanders when looked into. So when we prove to a TV channel or a newspaper that a certain case is not true, when we produce evidence of this, only some of them issue official denials in a corner in small print.

This is why it is necessary to show common sense and tolerance and even rest cold-blooded to a certain degree while perceiving the negative information about our church published nowadays. This information is intended to sow discord within our parishioners.

I suppose that many parishioners are just unhappy with the word 'Moscow' used with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. For example, in his recent sermon, Patriarch Kirill said that the Moscow Patriarchate is the 'mother church' of Kiev, when from the historical point of view, this mother is half a millennium younger than her daughter (the episcopal cathedra of Moscow was established together with the adoption of patriarchy in 1589; there was no metropolitan and episcopate in the history of Moscow). How does the Ukrainian church take statements of this kind?

In church jargon the notion 'mother church' is used with two different connotations. The orthodox may consider as mother church the church where they were baptized. I assume it was in this sense that Patriarch Bartholomeus referred to the Patriarchate of Constantinople as 'mother church' of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. Because it was

from Constantinople that Prince Vladimir adopted Christianity in ninth century. From this perspective, the Church of Kiev became the mother of all churches on the territory of the modern Russia and not only.

However, the term 'mother church' has another strictly canonical connotation. The mother church of each structure is the autocephalous church on which it depends and through which it connects to the world orthodoxy. Up until 1686 the Kiev Archdiocese was a part of the autocephalous Church of Constantinople. Later it shifted under the law of the Moscow Patriarchate. There may exist different interpretations of the historic aspect of that decision but nonetheless it rests valid. Although some patriarchs of Constantinople had criticized this decision, it was never officially denied.

The articles of the modern Ukrainian church stipulate that our church shall keep contact with all other local orthodox churches via the Russian Orthodox church. It is in this sense that the Russian Orthodox Church is called the mother church of the modern Ukrainian church. We have a canonical union with the Moscow Patriarchate and at the same time enjoy the rights of autonomy.

It happens that priests take a certain political position, doesn't it? For instance, the former Kiev resident Andrey Tkachev who blamed Maidan... What attitude does the church take towards them?

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church has repeatedly stated in its documents (decisions of the synod and the council of archpriests) that the ambon is not to be used as a platform for the propaganda of any political views. The Church must keep out of politics.

In 2007 when there were attempts to use

the church as a means to influence people and direct them towards certain political convictions, the Synod adopted a decision against politicization of the church. This is unacceptable for the church. And this is not about a certain political orientation, it concerns all political doctrines without exception.

The main task of any priest is to pacify souls. There is much aggression around. People are ready to kill each other but not to reconcile. In these terms the priest, who receive a special grace from God through ordination, must make very effort to reduce this hate. We are for national unity. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church proclaims not only in words but also in deeds that we support the integrity of Ukraine. Still we are very careful with each our word as we realize that if priests also get involved in this controversy, we will not be able to live together any more. In this sense, when we see any priest do otherwise, we suggest him the right approach.

Questions of putting an end to the schism within Ukrainian church have been raised since its very emergence. It seems now it has become even more unfeasible?

Each orthodox of Ukraine clearly understands that it is unnatural when people of one faith are split up. The schism in fact doesn't occur in religious terms. This is why we have always been advocating for a single orthodox church in Ukraine. However, as this is a problem of the church, the solution of it must be performed strictly in line with church criteria, i.e. canons. There is no point in relaying on political reasonability or personal preferences. I want to stress once again that the church is out of politics. Our destination is the salvation of human souls. That is why we are not concerned by the moment but – eternity. Unfortunately, the

behaviour of some confessions, of so-called Kyiv Patriarchate in particular, hampers our reunion. A first step towards the dialogue would be made by at least getting rid of aggressive rhetoric and actions towards the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

And yet, first of all, we are religious people and we pray God to help us overcome all these. We need the God to bless us but we must not forget to make our own human efforts too. I strongly hope that there will be a unified orthodox church in Ukraine, established on canonical principles while I am still alive.

How do you regard the meeting of Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis? Considering the thousand years of the dogmatic controversy between the Orthodox and Catholics, many orthodox believers see it as almost a 'betrayal'.

I myself was a member of that delegation. My opinion is that there is nothing bad in the fact that the heads of the Roman Catholic and the biggest Orthodox Churches said to the world and to politicians, which are very influential, that it is time to stop. In fact, we are now at a point, crossing which we risk to provoke a world catastrophe, a war that could wipe out the whole humanity.

I want to assure those orthodox people who, being suspicious about the Roman Catholic Church itself, took this meeting with a certain degree of apprehension: religious truths were not touched at all. All of us, and especially bishops at ordination swear the oath to be loyal to dogmatic truths given to us for our salvation. There is no point for apprehension either in the declaration signed by Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis or in their meeting. The main item on the agenda was the discussion of strained relations

between the West and East. Both parties having nuclear weapons, a clash might cause irreversible consequences. All arguments must be settled within a dialogue and mutual accord. Only thus we can grant a perspective of life and evolution of human civilization.

Sources

<http://korrespondent.net/ukraine/3649260-my-storonnyky-edynstva-hosudarstva-yntervui-s-upravliauischym-delamy-upts>

Request for the Return of Churches, Monasteries and Sacred Objects (ALBANIA)

March 17, 2016 - The Archdiocese of Albania convoked a clergy-laity assembly and she addressed a request to the State authorities by asking the return of Churches, Monasteries and sacred Objects, as the official website of the Archdiocese reports.

Here is the Request of the Archdiocese: "Photos that show young girls, advertising wedding dresses on the despotic throne, or in front of the Beautiful Gate and iconostasis icons, specifically inside the historic Orthodox churches of Berat and Elbasan are a great insult to the Orthodox Church.

This is obviously a sacrilege and an insult of religious feelings. Certainly, such occurrences spoil the religious harmony for which our country boasts about. Also, we highlight that such repeated offensive actions do not "promote" the cultural heritage of our country. It is worth mentioning the fact that such sacrilegious acts have not been committed towards any cult objects of the other religious communities in Albania. Therefore we protest because the state bodies, which still hold possession of the sacred sites and objects, even after twenty-five years of democracy in the country, give permission to

desecrate the holy and gracious objects of the Orthodox Church.

We ask for the law nr. 10057 Article 22/2 dated on 22/01/2009 on the "Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Albania and the Albanian Orthodox Church" to be finally applied and all the holy churches, monasteries, holy relics, icons and sacred objects of worship to be returned with no delay or excuses to the Orthodox Church. They are highly respected, honored and are sacred to all the Orthodox people around the world but also to the faithful in Albania".

Sources

<http://orthodoxalbania.org/alb/index.php/en-us/lajme-3/blog/3785-request-for-the-return-of-churches-monasteries-and-sacred-objects>

Discomfort of the Standing Synod of the Church of Greece for the Greek Minister of Education (GREECE)

March 1, 2016 - The Standing Synod of the Church of Greece, expressed unanimously its strong discomfort after the report of Metropolitan of Nea Ionia Gabriel for the interdiction to him to enter in a school and discuss with the students, as the official website of the Church of Greece reports.

For this reason, the Standing Synod decided a communication between the Archbishop Ieronymos and the Prime Minister of Greece, Mr. Tsipras, to whom he will give a letter of protest on behalf of the Standing Synod of the Church of Greece.

Sources

http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/holysynod.asp?id=2100&what_sub=d_typou

Representatives of the Kyiv Patriarchate prevent the UOC community of Kutychiv from performing worship (UKRAINE)

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/v-kutakh-kievskiy-patriarkhat-prepyatstvuetsya-obshchine-upts-sovershat-bogosluzheniya>

April 20, 2016 - On April 17 in Kutychiv, a town of Shumsk region in Ternopil, representatives of Kyiv Patriarchate prevented the UOC community's access to the articles needed for performing worship, a member of the Union of Orthodox Journalists reports.

According to the church priest Igor Kushniruk, after the first worship in an equipped tent performed a day before, it was decided to realize a Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. Forty people were willing to participate in the sacrament. The warden of the church, Nikolay Voznyuk and his son wanted to take some articles needed for the performance of the worship from the church lodge located within the territory of the church. However, representatives of the Kyiv patriarchate led by Yaroslav Misiychuk blocked the exit from the street with their cars and called the police. After having received the explanations the police officers recommended that all the articles be returned were they were taken until the resolution of the conflict and so was done.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the community could not perform its service for a long time as the local church in honor of Holy Righteous Anna became the object of raid schemes of the local self-proclaimed Kiev Patriarchate community. Their representatives block the entrance to the church area.

In order to resume the worships, the UOC community erected a donated military tent in the yard of a parishioner's home, where their first liturgy was celebrated on the holyday of the Praise to the Mother of God on April 16.

Chapter 4 : Discrimination of Orthodox Christians.

Discrimination against orthodox schools in funding (RUSSIA)

January 29, 2016 - His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia Kirill stated that the orthodox schools are discriminated against in the matter of funding as Interfax reports.

“Though the principle of equal funding of public and private schools is enshrined in the legislation some regional governments are seeking ways to reduce funding of orthodox schools compared to the state or municipal schools, thus orthodox schools are funded residually” – the Patriarch said on Friday at the IV Christmas parliamentary meetings in the Federation Council.

He provided an example when all the public schools in a particular region participate in the pilot project for the development of education and are provided with extra funding.

According to the Patriarch non-state schools are not included in this pilot project under various pretexts which is a discrimination against orthodox schools, citizens, children and parents, violation of the letter and spirit of law.

He also suggested that the funding of schools should depend on complexity and level of education.

“I take this opportunity to appeal for support to the Senators. In the regions the education should develop according to national peculiarities and traditions in cooperation with religious organizations” – said Patriarch.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=61755>

Russian Foreign Ministry draws CoE officer's attention to deteriorating believers' rights in Ukraine (UKRAINE)

March 23, 2016 - Russian Foreign Ministry Ombudsman for Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law Konstantin Dolgov, has criticized the religious rights situation in Ukraine, at a meeting with the Council of Europe's Director General of Democracy Snezana Samardzic-Markovic, as the website Interfax-Religion reports.

“He pointed out systematic flagrant violations of freedom of religion by means of consistent seizures of churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, which sometimes happen with the direct support of local authorities and law enforcement agencies, and killings of Orthodox priests,” says a report published on the Russian Foreign Ministry website on Wednesday, after the meeting held on March 21.

Samardzic-Markovic agreed it was necessary to keep the problem in the focus of the Council of Europe's attention, the ministry said.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12830>

A refugee demanded from an Orthodox bishop to remove his Cross (GREECE)

March 22, 2016 - Metropolitan of Kesariani Daniel (Greece), denounced that a refugee

demanding from Metropolitan of Piraeus to remove the Cross that he had on his monk hat, as the website romfea reports.

During the session of the assembly of clergymen in Volos, Metropolitan of Kesariani Daniel said that Metropolitan of Piraeus Serafim went to distribute food to the refugees in the port of Piraeus. A refugee approached him and demanded asked him to remove his Cross from his monk hat. Metropolitan of Piraeus expressed his discomfort to the authorities and asked how is it possible to ask from him to remove the Cross while the authorities tried to calm the refugee.

Metropolitan of Kesariani continued by reminding to the assembly that Archbishop of Athens and All Greece went to Piraeus also to give food to the refugees without his Pectoral Cross (encolpion). He underlined that Orthodox Christians in Greece have to be very careful because soon the situation will become very difficult.

Sources

<http://www.romfea.gr/epikairoτητα-xronika/7114-kaisarianis-prosfugas-eipe-ston-peiraios-na-bgalei-ton-stauro>

UN recognizes violation of rights of Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine (UKRAINE)

March 14, 2016 - Representatives of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, have reported the violation of the rights of Orthodox Christians in Western Ukraine, as the website Interfax-Religion reports.

They visited the Ternopol and Rovno regions of Ukraine, from 28th January until February 1st, where representatives

of the self-proclaimed Kiev Patriarchate made numerous attempts to seize by force churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, a posting on the website of the UOC said.

Members of the UN monitoring mission reported instances of physical violence, or compulsion, aimed at forcing people to change their creed, the report says.

It also reports complaints by local residents about the inaction of the local authorities, with regard to the violation of their rights in relation to the intimidation and discrimination of believers.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern with the fact that believers cannot pray in the places of worship they wish to, due to the obstructions.

The investigation of such cases is either ineffective, or not conducted at all, the office's report says.

Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia has already underlined that over 30 churches of the UOC had been overtaken by force, and no less than ten were under threat of attack by the dissenters and nationalists "presenting the developments as allegedly voluntary conversion of believers to the so-called Kiev Patriarchate."

Sources

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<http://news.church.ua/2016/03/10/oon-zayavlyaet-o-narushenii-prav-veruyushhix-v-zapadnyx-oblastyax-ukrainy/?lang=ru>

http://orthodoxrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Ukraine_13th_HRMMU_Report_3March2016.pdf

Acts of hostility against Orthodox clergymen (UKRAINE)

April 18, 2016 - Priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are subjected to regular attacks from radical nationalists and persecutions of the Ukrainian Security Service, coordinator of the Human Rights Advocacy Group on Information about Crimes against personality Maxim Vilkov said, as the website Interfax-Religion reports.

“We have registered about 30 such attacks, including not only attacks and illegal detentions, but trials and even murders,” the human rights advocate said at the additional OSCE session on Human Dimension Implementation held in Wien.

According to him, some UOC clerics were forced to leave Ukraine as nationalists and security services threatened them.

Vilkov also focused on arsons of Orthodox churches. “We registered 13 of such cases. Arsons of Orthodox churches are most often in Kiev. Lack of punishment for these crimes is very demonstrative,” he said.

The expert also reported at least 36 attempts of seizing UOC churches taken in 2014-2015.

The human rights advocate urged the OSCE Monitoring Mission to pay special attention on all these cases and recommended to include new provisions regarding protections of rights of religious communities in the list of OSCE monitoring criteria of observing human rights in Ukraine.

He also suggested to hold a forum under OSCE auspices dedicated to manifestations of violence and hatred in Ukraine on

confessional and jurisdictional characteristic as a factor influencing escalation of the Ukrainian conflict.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12889>

A priest of the UOC in Volyn and his family were evicted by Court decision at the suit of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UKRAINE)

April 5, 2016 - A priest of the UOC in Ugrinov village of Gorokhov region, Rostislav Sapojnik and his wife Natalia Sapojnik were evicted from the house where they had been living for 18 years, by the decision rendered by Lokachi Regional Court at the suit of the Kyiv Patriarchate, which has subsequently privatized the domicile, as the website Union of the Orthodox Journalist reports.

Moreover, the Court stated that their children, the first year university student Dionisiy and the school student Kirill reserve the right to reside at the said address.

According to the archpriest Rostislav Sapojnik, the representatives of the Service for Juvenile Matters of Gorokhov region were absent at the hearing having explained that they refer the consideration of the case concerning the eviction of the juveniles ‘to the court’. The juveniles weren’t evicted indeed, but it appears that their parents have to provide a remote parental care, being evicted from the house, were the whole family was registered at the moment of its privatization by the Kyiv Patriarchate.

Let us recall that the community of the Kyiv Patriarchate was registered in Ugrinov village after the capture of the UOC church in November 2014. Nevertheless, the intruders

claimed their rights to the house where the priest continued to live together with his family. They do not have another domicile.

Though the consideration of the case concerning the question of ownership of the house land is still pending, in summer 2015 the Kyiv Patriarchate was granted the property right over this house. In Autumn intruders filed a case to evict the family residing at this address.

The decision of the Lokachi Regional Court will be contested in the Court of Appeal. And we can just guess how the enforcement officers will execute it in case the decision remains unchanged.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/na-volyni-sud-otselil-svyashchennika-upts-ot-ego-detey-po-isku-kievskogo-patriarkhata>

The deputies of Verkhovna Rada were prevented from taking part in the memorial service in Odessa (UKRAINE)

May 2, 2016 - Kiev. The people's deputies from the faction "Opposition bloc" Yuriy Boyko, Vadim Novinsky and Evgeny Bakulin, who flew from Kiev to Odessa to take part in the memorial service for the victims of the events that occurred two years ago, were blocked at the Odessa airport as Interfax reports.

According to the statement of the opposition bloc, with the tacit support of the government the nationalists blocked the road from the airport in order to prevent Yuriy Boyko – the leader of the faction of the opposition bloc – and the deputies of the faction from commemorating the victims of the massacre of May 2.

Meanwhile, on "Facebook" the "Right Sector" (organization banned in Russia) posted that large reinforcements of patriots came to the airport and that the airport was completely blocked.

The "Right sector" accused the deputies of "supporting separatists" and informed that they flew to Kherson. Before that the deputies were moved to the upper floor of the airport, where they were joined by a priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church who committed a memorial service in the building.

V. Novinsky, in turn, told the TV channel "112.Ukraine" that the deputies came to Odessa "with exclusively peaceful missions", willing to participate in a memorial service for those killed May 2, 2014, which was performed by the Metropolitan Agafangel in the Cathedral of Odessa, and to visit Kulikovo.

After the coup in Ukraine the activists of "Antimaydan" set up a camp on the Kulikovo field in Odessa in protest. On May 2, 2014 on Greek square began a scuffle between the activists of "Antimaydan" on the one hand and football "Ultras" from Odessa and Kharkov, as well as the radicals of "Euromaidan" – on the other. The riots resulted in the destruction of the tent camp and burning of the House of Trade Unions, where the representatives of "Antimaydan" took refuge.

As a result, according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine about 50 people were killed, most of them in the House of Trade Unions. Odessa Mayor Gennady Truhanov declared May 2, 2016 as the Day of Remembrance for the victims.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=62891>

Greece slams Quran reading in Istanbul's Orthodox Christian Cathedral (TURKEY)

June 6, 2016 -The Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned on Monday the decision by the authorities of Turkey to read the Quran in Hagia Sophia Orthodox Christian cathedral in Istanbul during Ramadan as a regressive and bordering on fanaticism, as reports sputnik agency.

Hagia Sophia is a Greek Orthodox Christian patriarchal church from the sixth century which was later transformed into an imperial mosque and is currently a museum Ayasofya Muzesi. Last week, Turkish media reported that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that Quran would be read in the Hagia Sophia everyday during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

"We condemn the announcement of the Turkish authorities about plans to read the Quran in Hagia Sophia in Istanbul on the occasion of Ramadan as regressive. The persistent and bordering with fanaticism Muslim rituals in the World Heritage Site are incomprehensible and are a manifestation of a lack of respect and a lack of connection with reality. In addition, such actions are not compatible with modern democratic and secular societies," the Greek Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

For over a millennium, Hagia Sophia was the largest church in the Christian world. It is included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which this year runs from June 6 to July 5, Ramadan, is marked by fasting during

the daytime and is considered a time for spiritual reflection and increased devotion.

Sources

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Religious discrimination of Ukranian Orthodox Church clergy (UKRAINE)

June 21, 2016 - Kamensky (former Dneprodzerzhinsky) City Council does not recommend inviting the UOC priests to public events, as reports UOJ. A particular attention is paid to schools. The head of the Municipality's Education and Science Directorate calls to carry out "awareness-raising".

In the explanatory part of the document it is stated that there are parishes of the Kiev Patriarchate, Ukrainian Greek-Catholic and Roman-Catholic Churches in the city. "I believe it relevant and appropriate to the state policy of Ukraine to invite representatives of namely these parishes to public holidays and events", municipality secretary Alexandr Zalevsky writes in the document.

As for experts, they evaluate such initiatives as grave violations of the Constitution.

"Pursuant to article 35 of the Constitution, the Church and religious organizations are separated from the state, while schools are separated from the Church, says protopriest Alexandr Bahov, head of the UOC Law Department. – Therefore, invitations of representatives of religious organizations are not at all mandatory and do not fall under jurisdiction of

the Department for Education and the City Council on the whole. Besides, I'd like to note that according to art. 5 "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations", all religious institutions are equal before law and granting any preferences or, on the contrary, imposing restrictions are not to be permitted. In this case, judging from the document, there is a separation between "good" and "bad" religious organizations. Herewith unreliable and unverifi9ed information is used as a rationale".

The City Council secretary stresses that the UOC priests allegedly call to separatism. Besides, they do not blame Russia as an aggressor country.

"The authors affirm the Pochaev and Kiev Pechersk Lavra were purportedly distributing separatist literature despite the fact this information had been refuted both by the church authorities and the respective organizations who'd been looking into the matter, underscores protopriest Alexandr Bahov. – It is also not clear why they demand that the UOC should accuse somebody or admit an aggressor. The point is according to the regulations of the international and national legislation the UOC is not a subject of international relations. For that reason It has no right to give Its assessment of actions of other states: accuse or not accuse, admit or not admit an aggressor, an invader, or declare war. Besides, our civil servants turn a blind eye to the fact the UOC offers Its help to the displaced persons, injured, and victims' families. Within dioceses there are opened rehabilitation and spiritual support centers for the ATO participants. All the above information is available at the official sites and easy to check. There is a reference in

the letter to such "prohibitions" being in line with the state policy. Since when have violations of the religious organizations' rights become a state policy?"

The priest's opinion is fully shared by manager of the analytical center "Third Sector", political expert Andrey Zolotariov.

This is a pure religious discrimination. The civil servant is likely to have trimmed his sails to the wind from Kiev and decided "to rush to hell before his father", says the expert. – This proves a large-scale and risky game of Kiev authorities who have been trying to place the UOC outside the law. Yet it's worth recalling religious wars, for example, in XVI century in France, which swept away one third of the country's population. And a five-year religious war between Catholics and Protestants resulted in the population being unable to recover from that massacre for another 200 years. All this poses a huge threat."

Discriminatory documents of the City Council are dated May 26 and 31. Earlier a similar initiative distinguished Minister of Home Affairs Arsen Avakov, who issued an order № 205 in March on introducing chaplain's service in the National Guard. Inter alia, the document enshrines that the military unit command "does not allow (restrict the activities) of priests who belong to the religious organizations whose centers are located on the aggressor state's territory".

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/nasushchnyj-vopros/civil-servants-began-to-cut-off-uoc-clergy-from-society>

People's deputy of Petro Poroshenko Bloc was caught in manipulating the facts about the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)

June 28, 2016 - The Deputy of Petro Poroshenko Bloc Vadim Denisenko fell flat on his face while trying to play a joke on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), as the Union of the Orthodox Journalists reports.

The innate craving for beauty played a cruel joke on the Deputy of Petro Poroshenko Bloc. Denisenko saw a small church not far from Nezhyn, Chernihiv region, which injured his delicate taste. The church represented an ugly construction trailer with a shiny dome on top of it.

"I wonder what this priest who decided to claim future meal- place that way (not far from Nezhyn) has on his mind. And do not tell me that God doesn't care where people pray. He really doesn't care, but how can you deform more that ugly trailer?"- the deputy expressed his outrage on his page on Facebook. The church wouldn't appear so "ugly" to Denisenko if it didn't belong to the UOC – "Moscow church", as the deputy said.

And since it's a "Moscow church", the Ukrainian media wouldn't miss such an important topic. And now the patriotic edition Depo.ua blame the UOC for "incredible talent" on the "canonical" design of metal wagons.

In short, everything that we love: the righteous anger of patriots – against common professional principles. A skim through the Internet is enough to find this very terrible "Moscow" church, and confession to which it belongs.

The church is located in the village Jablonevoe (until recently – Radgospnoe) Nezhyn district of Chernihiv region, Lenin Street. In 2008 the religious community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) was registered there. In summer 2010 the Bishop of Chernihiv and Nezhyn Hilarion (UOC-KP) put and consecrated a cross here to build a church in honor of the Dormition of the Mother of God.

In the meantime, the followers of Filaret didn't manage to collect the money for the construction of full-fledged temple, thus the church is located in a trailer under a brilliant dome. Well, Mr. Deputy and the supporting journalists, after revealing the full information the dome doesn't look so ridiculous anymore, and the trailer is not so ugly ... Because the God really doesn't care where one prays. But it's important not to lie to yourself and others.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/spetsproekty/antifejk/nardep-iz-bloka-petra-poroshenko-popalsya-na-sozdanii-feykov-ob-upts>

Ukrainian Orthodox Church discriminated by state government (UKRAINE)

June 28, 2016 - To the solemn session on the occasion of 20th anniversary of the Constitution of Ukraine, there were invited primates of all denominations, except for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which appears as a violation of the citizens' equality on grounds of religious affiliation, as reports UOJ.

Reportedly, this session was attended by the country's political actors, representatives of civil organizations, including primates of all

denominations and religious associations of Ukraine, except for the most numerous Orthodox denomination in Ukraine – the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

“This time no invitation was sent to the Kiev Metropolitan’s Office to participate in festivities on the occasion of the Constitution Day. Therefore, the administration of the supreme legislative body of Ukraine gravely violated fundamental constitutional norms on the 20th anniversary of the Fundamental Law of Ukraine, thus emphasizing the fact that not all citizens on our state enjoy equal rights, based on their religious beliefs”, underlines the publication.

“What such a selective approach of the organizers is reasoned by remains vague. The Verkhovna Rada administration is expected to justify their action which is a telling example of discrimination of the state against the biggest denomination in the country. For the UOC united millions of Ukrainian citizens who took part at the time in electing the Parliament in its current composition”, declares the Awareness-Raising Division.

It will be reminded, the Verkhovna Rada has registered draft law №4511 that, according to political expert Mikhail Pogrebinskiy, “means war against the most influential Ukrainian denomination – the Ukrainian Orthodox Church” and absolutely contradicts the Constitution and laws of Ukraine.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/politika/on-constitution-day-the-vr-demonstrated-again-discrimination-of-the-uoc>

<http://news.church.ua/2016/06/30/kerivnictvo-verxovnoji-radi-publichno-znevazhilo-konstituciyyu-ukrajini-u-den-jiji-20-richchya/>

Turks hang pro-Islamic Ramadan banner on Orthodox Church (TURKEY)

June 6, 2016 - A group of Muslims unfolded a banner in front the Greek Orthodox Church in the southern province of Hatay, as reports TornosNews.gr

According to Turkish newspaper ‘Daily Sabah’, the banner read ‘We are celebrating the holy month of Ramadan in all the Islamic world’.

The article in Sabah points out the Church is located in a busy main street in the city of Alexandretta which serves the religious needs of the increasingly dwindling numbers of Christians in the country.

Sources

<http://www.tornosnews.gr/en/greek-news/culture/16571-turks-hang-pro-islamic-ramadan-banner-on-orthodox-church.html>

OSCE mission discussed religious oppression with the clergy of Ternopil diocese of the UOC (UKRAINE)

August 17, 2016 - Representatives of the Ternopil diocese of the UOC discussed problems of religious oppression in the region with members of the Special OSCE monitoring mission in Ukraine, as reports the Information and Education Department of the UOC and the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

During the dialogue, the parties discussed the issues of harassment of believers in the region, in particular cases of recent seizures of churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The attendees noted the need to resume the

development of the special Memorandum, which would contribute to conflict prevention and rapid solution in case of seizure of religious buildings. Representatives of both sides expressed hope for further fruitful cooperation.

Sources

<http://news.church.ua/2016/08/16/kliriki-ternopolskoj-eparxii-obsudili-s-chlenami-monitoringovoj-missii-obse-sostoyanii-religioznoj-svobody-v-regione/?lang=ru>

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/osce-mission-discussed-religious-oppression-with-the-clergy-of-ternopil-diocese-of-the-uoc>

Discrimination against Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the appointment of Advisor to the Minister of Defence (UKRAINE)

August 18, 2016 - There is an element of discrimination against the other denominations on religious grounds in the appointment of a UAOC bishop as Advisor to the Minister of Defence, says Ruslan Bortnik, Executive Director of the Ukrainian Institute of Policy Analysis and Management, as reports UOJ.

“Of course, in the army there must be a chaplain to support military people and help them stay in the religious and Christian communion. The choice to appoint one person from one particular denomination looks like discrimination, especially because in Ukraine this Orthodox Church is not dominant. We should not appoint a person with such a pronounced religious affiliation”, the analyst believes.

Ruslan Bortnik is sure that the manifestation of democracy in the society could be, for example, the appointment of representatives of all religious denominations in Ukraine as the

Minister of Defence Advisor on religious affairs.

“And so this is a definite sign for the society that the Ministry of Defence singles out one of the denominations. Especially since the church is separated from the state, the state authorities cannot so demonstratively show their likes and dislikes,” said Ruslan Bortnik.

August 17, UAOC Bishop Vladimir Cherpak was appointed Advisor to the Minister of Defence of Ukraine on religious affairs.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/politika/there-is-an-element-of-discrimination-in-the-appointment-of-uaoc-bishop-as-advisor-to-the-minister-o>

In Kiev the teacher was condemned for wishing to have a canonical Church in her native village (UKRAINE)

September 28, 2016 - The staff of Borovskaja School decided to “condemn the behavior and activities of the teacher Sulko T.P., which is contrary to the decision of the village community of Borovaja on inexpediency of construction of the church of the Moscow Patriarchate.”

In the village Borovaja Kiev region once again it was reminded about the oppression of believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) on religious grounds and cynical media war against the UOC, as <http://news.church.ua> reports.

On September 25, 2016 an extract from the minutes of the local school staff meeting condemning an English teacher Sulko T.P., parishioner of the UOC, was published on the website Borovoy.

Extract from the minutes of the school staff meeting:

Demonstrating expressive bias and legal illiteracy, the teachers accused teacher of unacceptable behavior and activities – “building the Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.”

In the spirit of atheistic propaganda of the totalitarian regime, labor school staff recommended Tatyana Petrovna “to take into account the remarks and advice of colleagues” and “make conclusions”.

Published online the extract from minutes is accompanied by a remark with reference to formerly respected teacher with a good reputation who wanted to have a temple of the canonical Church. The administrators of the website are not afraid to express their intolerance to believers and slander.

As noted earlier, the incitement to discrimination and aggression against the believers of the UOC is spread through the website of the village Borovaja by its owner – the chairman of PO party “Freedom” Gorbinko U. and chairman of the NGO “Civil asset Borovaja” A.A. Gladchenko.

Sulko T.P. as a parishioner of the UOC has suffered from mockery and insults for her religious beliefs. In the auditorium of the school Tatiana Petrovna was publicly accused of treason. The deputy of the village council in Borovaja Buhalsky M.A., who has been for 25 years parishioner of the UOC, suffers from the same religious intolerance. Against the woman continue to fabricate baseless accusations, and some aggressively disposed to the Church even threatened with physical violence.

Sources

<http://news.church.ua/2016/09/28/na-kyivshhine-uchitelnicu-osudili-za-zhelanie-imet-v-svoem-poselke-kanonicheskuyu-cerkov/?lang=ru>

OSCE collects information on violation of UOC believers' rights in Kutly and Borovaya (UKRAINE)

September 23, 2016 - In Kiev and Shumsk there were two meetings of representatives of the OSCE Monitoring Missions with the clergy and believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, as reports the Union of the orthodox journalists.

On September 21 in Shumsk clerics of Ternopol diocese of the UOC met with the representatives of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine of Ivano-Frankovsk Unit. The clergy and representatives of Kutly parish told the observers about circumstances of the forcible takeover of their church by the adherents of the “Right Sector” and Kiev Patriarchate, as well as other facts of discrimination of the UOC believers' rights in the village.

It was also noted that currently members of the Kiev Patriarchate in the village exacerbate an inter-faith conflict by resorting to provocative behavior. In particular, one of the village residents, a local school teacher and a supporter of the UOC KP, tells schoolchildren at schools that buying candles in the UOC temples, people buy bullets for Ukrainian soldiers.

It was reported earlier that similar disinformation is disseminated by the “Right Sector” members in Ternopol during divine services in the local UOC Cathedral.

A day before a resident of Borovaya town, who had transferred her property to build a church of the UOC, totally destroyed two weeks ago, met with an observer of Kiev representative office of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine Fernando

Herrera Inaraja. The observer was reported details of an illegal destruction of the private property, as well as stirring up inter-faith hatred and inciting local residents to animosity towards the UOC faithful by the MPs and public activists.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/osce-collects-information-on-violation-of-uoc-believers-rights-in-kuty-and-borovaya>

Russian journalists detained in Kosovo while filming footage about Orthodox churches (KOSOVO)

September 17, 2016 - A group of Russian journalists from the News Front agency has been detained in Kosovo, as reports inserbia.info.

“The head of the News Front Serbian editorial office, citizen of Russia Oxana Sazonova, as well as freelance cameraman Sergey Belous were detained by Kosovo’s police while filming footage about Orthodox churches located in its territory, as well as about how the Albanians and the Serbs live side by side in the region. The journalists planned to film a documentary about Kosovo,” the news agency’s director Konstantin Knyrik said.

Sazonova and Belous were detained in the village of Velika Hoca and were then taken to Pristina, he said.

“The journalists were accused of violating the rules for staying in Kosovo. Their video equipment has been confiscated, and they are not being allowed to get in touch with their family and Russia’s diplomatic mission in Serbia,” he said.

A lawyer has been sent to help the detained journalists, Knyrik said.

“They have tentatively been accused of ‘illegally crossing the border’, a charge which carries a fine of 2,500 euros or a year in prison,” he said.

Sources

<http://inserbia.info/today/2016/09/russian-journalists-detained-in-kosovo-while-filming-footage-about-orthodox-churches/>

UOC-KP priest evicts ATO zone refugees from a shelter (UKRAINE)

September 15, 2016 - The priest of the UOC-KP Nikolai Ilnitsky, who is concurrently a deputy of the Kotsyubinskoe village council, Kiev region, evicted from the shelter for displaced more than two hundred people from Donbass, as reports the union of the orthodox journalists.

Now they are forced to urgently seek a new home. Parties to the conflict claim that their only fault is that immigrants do not attend regularly the service of the priest-host.

The building used as a shelter is a privatized property of the representative of the UOC-KP in Kotsyubinskoe; the intended use is a shelter for displaced persons, and the land under the former kindergarten is leased by the same Nikolai Ilnitsky for the period of 25 years for 1 UAH.

“This father has been the hero of a lot of beautiful news stories of almost all my colleagues from the national TV channels. After the “bang-stories” a lot of money has been transferred into the account of the religious community. In particular, the ex-minister Alexander Klimenko listed a million UAH after the news story in the “1+1,” said the journalist Irina Fedoriv.

“Even after that Nikolai Ilnitsky complained

from the TV screens that he is short of money. As a journalist and a local deputy I must say how the money is spent during the ATO when it is so needed at the front, and how the priest-deputy Nikolai Ilnitsky who even the escaped politician donates, violates the law of Ukraine,” says the journalist.

“He (Nikolai Ilnitsky) privatized the facility under the pretext of aid to refugees, and now everyone who does not want to go to him to pray is thrown away? So does a totalitarian sect, taking its adherents into total submission,” said the political expert Pavel Karnazytsky.

It is reported that about 10 years ago, part of the premises of the former kindergarten was leased by the religious community of the UOC-KP for the period of 49 years to make a rehabilitation center here. In late 2013, Nikolai Ilnitsky convinced the deputies that the kindergarten wouldn't be constructed on the land, and so he asked to privatize 1250 sq. meters. When refugees from the East arrived, he asked for additional 250 meters for rent. Subsequently Kotsyubinskoe residents found out that the shelter for refugees was let as a hotel.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/in-kotsyubinskoe-uoc-kp-priest-evicts-ato-zone-refugees-from-a-shelter>

OSCE studies religious situation in Krivoy Rog UOC diocese (UKRAINE)

November 2, 2016 - Representatives of the Special Monitoring Mission got interested in the draft decision of Krivoy Rog City Council, which has to do with one of the diocese's parishes, as reports the union of the orthodox journalists.

On 31 October representatives of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission met with Metropolitan of Krivoy Rog and Nikopol Ephrem.

A matter of the visit was draft decision #50 of Krivoy Rog City Council “On approval of the land maintenance draft regarding allocation of the land plot in 45a Sviato-Nikolayevskaya Street, registration of the right to its communal ownership, and its transfer to the permanent use for locating a complex of buildings and constructions of the Orthodox church “Saint Nikolaos Church”.

Local mass media and activists who are opposed to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, made it a high-profile case and spoke against the transfer of the land plot to the “Moscow Patriarchate”, as they put it themselves.

“The crux of the conflict, aroused by activists, is that Krivoy Rog diocese did not file an application on allocation of the additional land plot for a church, but tries to formalize land documents for the Saint Nikolaos church, built as long ago as 2001,” explains the Information and Education Department.

Vladyka Ephrem expounded this situation to the SMM representatives and answered their questions.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/osce-studies-religious-situation-in-krivoy-rog-uoc-diocese>

Ukrainian Parliament does not authorise hospitals to recruit priests (UKRAINE)

November 3, 2016 - The Verkhovna Rada did not adopt on first reading bill № 4987 on the introduction of pastoral care in health care service. According to UNIAN, only 165

deputies voted in favour of this decision, with the required minimum of 226, as reports the union of the oerthodox journalists.

Also, the VR did not support the proposal to send the bill to the relevant committee and the authors for revision, so the bill was denied.

Presenting the bill, Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Health Bogomolets (BPP) stressed that the bill proposed to introduce the term “pastoral care” – work of clergy (chaplains), authorized by religious organizations, in health care institutions.

She noted that the bill provides for the activities of the priests who have been specially trained and selected, on a voluntary or public basis. “Therefore, the question regarding the pressure on local budgets is not in on the agenda,” added Bogomolets.

She said that they are currently carrying negotiations with Taras Shevchenko National University on the possibility of opening a new Faculty of Pastoral Care for the training of medical, military and prison chaplains. Bogomolets also reported that the bill proposes to grant the right to clergymen (chaplains) to be a member of the commission on bioethics under health institutions.” It is these commissions which will also collaborate with the transplant coordinators who will develop the system of transplantation in Ukraine,” she said.

People’s deputy of Ukraine Vladimir Litvin (the group “Volia naroda (People’s will)” during the discussion of the project noted that it would be reasonable to introduce priests in the Verkhovna Rada to stop “a session of hatred” in the Parliament when MPs remind of the “flock mates, who are divided into certain groups, and the leaders of these flocks are trying to prove a dominant position.”

Litvin pointed out that today Ukraine needs laws that will improve the situation in medicine; and voting for the bill in question today shows “our helplessness” in the issue of changes in the industry and its normal funding.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/parliament-does-not-authorise-hospitals-to-recruit-priests>

A. Reaction of the Local Orthodox Churches to the discrimination of their members.

Archbishop Luka protests for attempts to divide the Ukrainian society (UKRAINE)

January 2, 2016 - During a press conference with the journalists of Zaporizhia (Ukraine), Archbishop Luka of Zaporizhia and Melitopol expressed his opinion about the suggestion of the Secretary of the Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council Alexander Turchinov. Mr. Turchinov suggested to move the celebration of the Nativity of Christ from January 7 to December 25, reports the Information Department of Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) with reference to the Reporter-ua.com website. January 7 is the civil date on which falls the 25th of December according to the old calendar.

According to His Eminence, the celebration of Christmas on this date is an ancient tradition for Orthodox Christians and it would be meaningless to move the feast-day allegedly for European integration. It is an attempt to split the Ukrainian society.

"This statement has exploded the public. This is the tradition in which we live. If we move the celebration, we will lose our tradition and will not acquire a new one. People are seeking to split our society. This idea is not from God. Our Church lives according to its own calendar, and we will continue to celebrate according to our own calendar. Again the society is being divided into "friends" and "aliens", into "black" and "white", Archbishop Luka commented.

Sources

<http://news.church.ua/2016/01/02/arxiepiskop-luka-o-perenose-daty-rozhdestva-eto-popytka-raskolot-ukrainskoe-obshchestvo/>

The chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church discussed the interfaith situation in Ukraine with the head of the UN monitoring mission (UKRAINE)

March 9, 2016 - The chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the Metropolitan of Borispol and Brovary Antony met with Fiona Fraser, Deputy Chief of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission and the representatives of the Mission delegation at the Holy Dormition Kiev-Pechersk Lavra on March 9, as the Information and Education Department of the UOC reports.

Both sides discussed the results of the visit of the mentioned international organization staff members to a number of western regions of Ukraine, where violations of the rights of the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were registered.

The delay in the registration of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Statutes by the Ministry of Culture and the potential adoption of the draft law N4128 by Verkhovna Rada which may lead to additional interreligious confrontations in Ukraine were also brought up during the meeting.

Sources

<http://news.church.ua/2016/03/09/upravlyayushhij-delami-upc-obsudil-s-glavoj-monitoringovoj-missii-on-mezhreligioznuyu-situaciyu-v-ukraine/?lang=ru>

The Regular meeting of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations calls the authorities to listen to the voice of people (UKRAINE)

March 1, 2016 - On the premises of the Metropolitan's Residence at the "St. Sophia of Kyiv" National Preserve, the regular meeting of the All Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO) was held, as the website of the DECR of the UOC (Moscow Patriarchate) reports.

With the blessing of His Beatitude Onufriy, Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine, the meeting was attended by the Administrator of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, His Eminence Antony, Metropolitan of Boryspil and Brovary, Deputy Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (DECR UOC) Archpriest Mykolay Danylevych and also Head of the Legal Department of the UOC Archpriest Olexandr Bakhov. In addition to representatives of various denominations, the meeting was also attended by representatives of relevant state authorities of Ukraine.

Council members discussed the current situation in the country, the results of which have been adopted in the "Declaration of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations on the socio-political situation in the country ". In the Declaration, representatives of the Ukrainian confessions expressed concern about the situation in the country and called on the authorities to listen to the voice of the people and take care of the interests of the

state, so as to avoid future political strife. In addition, a myriad of problems was also discussed that have accumulated in the area of church-state relations.

In particular, the Administrator of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Antony of Boryspil and Brovary in his speech said that people in Ukraine are increasingly despondent with regards to their faith in politicians and are seeking solace and hope in God, as evidenced by the crowded churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. "This, from a human point of view, has pleasantly surprised us, especially if you take into account the tones of unimaginable informational garbage, slander and criticism that has poured onto our Church by the mass-media", His Eminence declared. Despite all the challenges, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has always adhered to the principles of inter-religious and inter-confessional peace. However, notwithstanding this, a strong feeling persists that there is an ongoing attempt to artificially destroy the world. As an example, Metropolitan Antony discussed the draft bill №4128 (amendments to Article 8 of the Law of Ukraine "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" (to change the religious communities' affiliation), authored by MP, Mr. V.E. Yelenskyi, which was recently registered in the Verkhovna Rada. In His Eminence's opinion, this bill is dangerous for both the religious community of Ukraine as a whole and for continued inter-confessional peace in our country. Since this draft legislation entitles persons who are not members of a given religious community to, via unilateral declaration, state that they are indeed part of a certain community, and thereafter can influence

decisions made in the parish council of a certain religious community. In other words, this legislative initiative is an attempt to legitimize the scheme of raider seizure of churches on the legislative level. Metropolitan Antonyi also expressed concern that this legislative initiative was not previously discussed and not agreed upon by all AUCCRO members, which it directly affects.

“We are all very much aware why this law and similar regulations are being promulgated. However, we must also be aware, that the effect of these laws will be felt by all religious organizations throughout Ukraine. If today the bill is directed primarily against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, then tomorrow, with similar objectives in mind, this legislation can also be used against communities belonging to other confessions and religious organizations”, – stated the Vladyka.

In addition, Metropolitan Antonyi expressed concern that the Department on Religions and Nationalities at the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine is stalling or not even bothering to register the statutes of the dioceses, monasteries and parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. A state authority representative was, in fact, presented with the specific facts. Similar concerns were expressed by representatives from the other confessions in Ukraine. Following the discussions, it was decided to establish a working group of representatives from both the various Faiths and also competent State departments, which will discuss the said bill №4128 in detail, as well as the difficult issue concerning the registration of the Articles and Statutes of religious organizations.

During the meeting, representatives from various religious communities of Ukraine considered a number of current issues, which included proposals to celebrate this year's 20th Anniversary of the founding of AUCCRO.

Sources

<http://vzcz.church.ua/en/2016/03/04/kyiv-the-regular-meeting-of-the-all-ukrainian-council-of-churches-and-religious-organizations-held/>

The Standing Synod of the Church of Greece concerning a new law which is in contradiction with the Teaching of the Orthodox Church (GREECE)

March 1, 2016 - In the session of March, the Standing Synod of the Church of Greece expressed its discomfort against the new law (4368/2016) about the willing of the funeral of a departed person, as the official website of the Church of Greece reports.

The new law imposes the obligation to all Greek priests to celebrate the office of funeral for every person wants it even for those who chose the cremation instead of being buried. The Standing Synod underlined that the choice of an Orthodox funeral can't be combined with cremation because it's against the Tradition of the Orthodox Church and the legislator keeps silence about it.

The Holy Synod of the Church of Greece mentions that she had addressed a letter to the Minister and she asked him to keep a stipulation in favor of the Canons of the Church and the tradition of every religious community but it was ignored.

The Standing Synod considers that “this law is not in conformity with the Constitution. The State has to realize that Religious

Freedom is for all. That means that a law in favor of atheists or in favor of people who have indifferent position towards the religion can't be imposed to the Orthodox Church which is the majority in Greece. Those who spread lies and insist on saying that the Church of Greece is against because she will lose money from the cemeteries, have to know that money from the cemeteries go directly to the Municipality. If the Church of Greece was interested in money she would agree to the celebration of the funeral for those who chose the cremation", says the Standing Synod.

Sources

http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/holysynod.asp?id=2100&what_sub=d_typou

Greek deputy accuses the Minister of Education for racism against Orthodox Christians (GREECE)

March 14, 2016 - The Greek deputy of the governmental party Syriza Mr. Michelogiannakis accused the Minister of Education Mr. Filis for racism against Orthodox Christians, as the website romfea reports.

Mr Michelogiannakis spoke in Mega Channel and he said that he disagrees with the opinion of Mr Filis concerning the replacement of the course of Orthodox Religion with a course of secular study of religious beliefs. The Greek deputy addressed to the Minister of Education and he said: "What does it mean this replacement? This that you want to do is a racism against Orthodox Christians".

Sources

<http://www.romfea.gr/diafora/6944-mixelogiannakis-ratsismos-kata-ton-xristianon-auto-pou-kanei-o-filis>

Chairman of DECR UOC informs international European organizations of Church's position on draft law 4511 (UKRAINE)

April 28, 2016 - On April 27, 2016, the Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (DECR UOC) His Eminence Metropolitan Mytrofan of Luhansk and Alchevsk has sent letters to international European human rights organizations, human rights representatives of leading international organizations who have offices in Ukraine, and also to embassies of major EU countries in Kyiv, in which He explained the position of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with regards to the Draft bill №4511 "Concerning the special status of religious organizations whose administrative centres are located within a state that is recognized by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine as an aggressor state".

In the letters, Metropolitan Mytrofan particularly pointed out that, if ratified, the said draft bill would significantly restrict the rights of freedom of conscience and religion, since it contains elements of discrimination and would only further divide the citizens of Ukraine on religious grounds. The adoption of this bill could lead to new conflicts in the social and religious environment of our country and adversely affect the international image of Ukraine.

Commenting on this legislative initiative, the DECR UOC noted that on April 23, 2016, during a meeting of the members of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRO) with the President of Ukraine Mr. P. O. Poroshenko, the representatives of the

major faiths in Ukraine appealed to the President requesting that all amendments to the legislation on freedom of conscience and religion be ratified only if preliminary consultations and discussions are conducted with the religious communities. The President reacted positively to this request and promised to give appropriate instructions to the competent authorities. Hence, the draft bill №4511 must also go through the process of discussions with and be approved by the denominations that make up AUCCRO.

It may be well worth recalling, that similar attempts of interference by the state into the affairs of the Church, namely to liquidate, terminate activities or cancel registration have all taken place in the recent past. In early 2014 during the events of Maidan, representatives of the previous government, namely the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, threatened to “terminate the activity” and withdraw the registration of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC).

Similarly, in late 2014, there were attempts by certain representatives of the parliamentary body to exert pressure on our church by employing the catch phrase “religious organization whose administrative centre is located outside of Ukraine.” Then the main scientific-expert administration of the Apparatus of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine in its opinion drew attention to the fact that such moves were unconstitutional and violated international norms with regards to state intervention into the affairs of religious organizations.

Today we are witnesses to attempts to continue this policy, when politicians want to confer “special status” upon the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and the proponents and initiators of the draft bill

have already admitted this publicly, despite the fact that no specific denomination is named in the text of the proposed bill.

Sources

<http://vzcz.church.ua/en/2016/04/28/chairman-of-decr-uoc-informs-international-european-organizations-of-churchs-position-on-draft-law-4511/>

Archbishop Luka applied to the authorities of Zaporozhye asking them to address the problem of discrimination of UOC in the region (UKRAINE)

April 14, 2016 - Archbishop of Zaporozhye and Melitopol Luka applied the local authorities on April 14, as reports press service of UOC.

In his letter the archpriest expressed the concern of believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church about the fact that representatives of the region's largest religious denomination, the Diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Zaporozhye weren't invited to the requiem service dedicated to the international day of prisoners of nazi concentration camps, reports the Department for Rising Awareness of the UOC with the reference to the press-service of the Diocese. According to the archbishop Luka, this ignorance of the canonical church by authorities is perplexing. It happened after ‘the place for the organization of the ceremony was chosen and arranged at orthodox believers’ expense just as was installed the standing cross’. In his letter, the archbishop also asked: ‘How to explain this forgetfulness or inattention that you manifest towards the social activity of Zaporozhye Diocese’s flock? It was said during the meeting: “There are school students taking part in this requiem service for the victims

of nazi, they must learn firmness, resistance and heroism from it". So what example are you setting for them? This is an example of artificially and intentionally making from the orthodox bishop, priests and thousands of ordinary faithful people enemies, not having invited those who created this memorial.

The administration of Zaporozhye Diocese makes every effort to preserve the peace, civil tranquillity, steadfastness in the pastoral direction of all its sons regardless political or any other social convictions. Daily prayer for peace and reconciliation is the main concern of each orthodox Christian of the Diocese. The quality of a public officer's work is estimated by the results he/she obtains. Ukraine follows European values according to which, when untruthfulness of a public officer's statements or professional deeds is disclosed, he/she must resign. If a person in his/her office brings more harm than benefit, he/she is dismissed. If the transport system doesn't function properly, it is evident that this is the fault of the one who is responsible for it, if there is a problem in the field of health, the responsible for health is to be held to account. What must happen to make us understand that wrong people are charged for the relationship between church and state in our region? Moreover, they aren't even interested in this field. Should a religious war start? In a state governed by the rule of law, the status that Ukraine is aiming at, people must keep in mind that they are responsible for their words and deeds. Let's recall a proverb of our people: "you reap what you sow". In addition, the more boomerangs with unpleasant situations one throws from outside the sharper might be the stab he/she or the common activity in which he/she participates will take in return.

In one of his sermons, His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry said: "One's own truth might seem very nice and promising but might bring the death. While the divine will might sometimes be unpleasant or even harsh, or hard, but it brings life".

We hope that you will estimate and understand correctly the attempts to artificially create a hostile image of orthodox believers of Zaporozhye Diocese of the UOC.

Sources

<http://news.church.ua/2016/04/14/arxijepiskop-luka-zvernuvsya-do-vladi-zaporizhzhya-u-zvyazku-z-diskriminacijyu-ukrajinskoji-pravoslavnoji-cerkvi/>

<http://hram.zp.ua/?p=99893>

Orthodox Bishop denounces the deterioration of Orthodox Christians in Greece (GREECE)

April 5, 2016 - Metropolitan of Kalavryta and Egialia, Amvrosios (Greece), denounced the deterioration of Orthodox religion in Greece from the invasion of thousands illegal immigrants, as the website agionoros reports.

Metropolitan Amvrosios underlines the important contribution of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation. He says: "What is the meaning of the transmission of news reports in Arabic? Does any single immigrant have a TV or an opportunity to watch programs on the Greek state channel? And who asked the Greek citizens who pay taxes towards state TV?"

The bishop denounced the behavior of Greek media against the Orthodox Church of Greece: "At the same time, state television has been silent about the great charitable work of the Church, the self-sacrificing work of our clergy and laity. The media has also ignored

the rally against electronic ID cards that gathered thousands of participants”.

Sources

<http://agionoros.ru/docs/2319.htm>

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia is calling upon the Ukrainian authorities not to interfere in affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (RUSSIA)

May 1, 2016 - His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia is calling upon the Ukrainian authorities not to attempt to reform the field of religion for political reasons, as Interfax reports.

“We have to remind all the authorities (in Ukraine) that the religious beliefs of people and the life of the Church are sacred and shouldn’t be reformed in favour of the political objectives,” – said the Patriarch in an interview to television channel NTV.

According to the primate it is very dangerous “and above all never leads to the results that the initiators of this kind of pressure on the Church would have desired to achieve.”

The current actions of the Ukrainian authorities towards the believers remind him of the Soviet era when the canonical Church was persecuted and support was given to dissenters – the so-called “Renovators”.

“Unfortunately nowadays Ukraine is falling into the same trap and all that for the sake of consolidation of the society. Wasn’t it for the sake of consolidation of the society in Soviet Russia that the believers were persecuted? Socially and ideologically alien people

had to accept the reforms or eliminated. If the same happens in Ukraine, it will be a catastrophe,” - the Patriarch stated.

There are three Orthodox religious organizations in Ukraine: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate and the two which are not recognized in the Orthodox world – Kyiv Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Since the military operations in Ukraine were launched, dozens of temples were seized by the UOC dissenters – often with the support of nationalists and local authorities.

Earlier, the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko has repeatedly advocated the establishment of the local Orthodox Church in the country. One of the aims of the initiative is to separate the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from the Moscow Patriarchate.

Recently in Verkhovna Rada (Parliament of Ukraine) a draft law on the special status of religious organizations whose directing centers are located in the state recognized as the aggressor country was registered. The authors are members of the “Block of Petro Poroshenko.” The Ukrainian Orthodox Church criticized the draft law and referred to representatives of the European Union.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=62880>

Orthodox Church discriminated with education reform in Greece (GREECE)

September 26, 2016 - Hierarchs of the Church of Greece have commented on the scandalous statements made by Greek

Education Minister Nikos Filis, as reports pravoslavie.ru.

Minister Filis announced the complex school system reform in an interview with Greek media. Following the changes to the content of Religious Studies courses, History will be cleared of “national prejudices” as well. In addition, there are plans to introduce compulsory Sex Education for which the relevant “curricular material” is under development. Moreover, Filis subjected the position of the Church during the Second World War to unjustified criticism.

Metropolitan Theologos of Serres, in his interview with Greek television, noted that “the Education Minister is constantly attacking the Church without cause. For our part, we do not hold a grudge against him, but at the same time we cannot be silent when historical truth is being deliberately distorted.”

Metropolitan Georgios of Livadeia demanded that the government stop the one-sided imposition of the new school curriculum without taking into account the position of the Orthodox Church.

In the view of Metropolitan Makarios of Siderokastron, the school reform and changes in teaching Religious Studies are aimed at “the de-Christianization of society. This is a catastrophe and suicide for Greeks.”

Metropolitan Prokopios of Neapolis characterized the current education reform as “a dangerous and useless experiment which is capable of putting an end to the Greek educational tradition and religious identity. The Church cannot remain indifferent and unconcerned about anti-Orthodox experiments like these.”

Metropolitan Amvrosios of Kalavrita

stressed that “Greece, Orthodoxy and the Church of Greece are being persecuted!” The metropolitan called for discharging the scandalous minister Filis without delay and for stopping these reforms which are disastrous for Greece.

Primate of the Church of Greece Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens sharply reacted to the Minister of Education’s statements as well, suspending all contact with members of the government.

Sources

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/97414.htm>

Discrimination of Church of Greece (GREECE)

October 3, 2016 - Metropolitan Paul of Sisanion and Siatista has compared the behavior of the current Greek Education Minister with that of the notorious Roman Emperor Nero: “Nero set Rome on fire and accused Christians of this crime so as to avoid the people’s wrath. Likewise, Mr. Nikos Filis, who holds the primary responsibility for society’s moral degradation is accusing the Orthodox Church of everything,” as reports pravoslavie.ru.

The hierarch of the Church of Greece has supported His Beatitude Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens and All Greece who refused to meet with N. Filis: “It is necessary to bring it to the head of government’s notice that the Minister has lost credit with the Church.”

Metropolitan Anthony has accused the authorities of the unwillingness to build the relations with the Church on the basis of equality, within the framework laid out in the Constitution of Greece: “What does

cooperation mean to you? ‘I speak and you just listen to me?’”

The Education Minister’s bias has really displeased the hierarch: “He (Nikos Filis) has asked Jews, Muslims and Catholics to work out the curricula for the religious studies courses and to choose teachers for their own children; but he has deprived Orthodox Christians of this right.” In Metropolitan Anthony’s view, the minister’s true goal is to sow doubts in faith into Orthodox children’s hearts by means of specially devised curricula.

Metropolitan Seraphim of Piraeus has expressed his opinion that a specific project aimed at “changing the religious identity” of Greeks is gradually being implemented. According to the metropolitan, Greeks must not “accept pseudo-multiculturalism whose genuine task is to make all people the same and to take our freedom.”

The archpastor has stressed that there are attempts to prevent Greeks from passing on the national ideals, which form the Greek identity, from generation to generation and to turn the people into “a faceless mass.”

Sources

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/97552.htm>

Chapter 5: The Right of Freedom of Assembly for Orthodox Christians.

Rivne Court infringed the rights of believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Ptichya village (UKRAINE)

January 19, 2016 - According to the head of the NGO “Public protection of rights”, human rights activist Oleg Denisov, Rivne city court judge ordered the arrest of a church building belonging to the religious community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Ptichya village, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists. Thus, the court in fact deprived the Ukrainians of the right to freedom of religion.

“Arrest of a real property in criminal proceedings may only be conducted if the property is owned by individuals listed in Section 1 of Article 170 of the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine, namely the suspect, accused or those who by virtue of the law shall bear civil liability for damage caused by the suspect or accused”, – said Denisov.

He explained that the judgment is based on allegedly received threats of destruction – burning of the church building. “The police should have opened criminal proceedings, searched for blackmailers and took a matter to court – the threats would have stopped after several judgements. What is the reason for arresting a church? Can a paper glued to the doors of the church prevent its actual destruction? Definitely not” – said human rights activist.

“All this perjurious testimony is fabricated in order to justify the arrest because the representatives of the Kiev Patriarchate can't accept the fact of their court defeat, and

the government isn't able to restore legal order and prosecute those who are openly encroaching on the property of the believers “- explained Denisov.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/zashchita-tserkvi/pravozashchitnik-rovenskiy-sud-posyagnul-na-prava-veruyushchikh-upts-v-ptichey>

The Court of Appeal didn't dismiss the case of take-over of the cathedral of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Gribovitsa (UKRAINE)

January 21, 2016 - The Court of Appeal of Volyn region allowed the appeal of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church community against the Ivanychevsky district court's ruling (judge Mr. Neverov I.N.) of January 5, 2016, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

The decision of Ivanychevsky court contained a refusal to settle a claim of the Holy Pokrov religious community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church against the investigator's decision to dismiss the criminal case regarding conflict in the cathedral of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the village Gribovitsa.

The decision of the senior investigator of the region dated December 16, 2015 declared the criminal proceedings on the matter of impeding the exercise of religious rites and illegal detention of a sanctuary closed (№12015030080000330 of November 23, 2015).

According to the decision of the Court of Appeal the trial of the take-over of the cathedral belonging to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church by the representatives of the Kyiv Patriarchate shall be reopened.

The cathedral in Gribovitsa belonging to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was closed after a public conflict in September 2015 initiated by community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – Kyiv Patriarchate. A few months earlier, despite of the agreement to resolve a property dispute within legal framework, the representatives of the Kyiv Patriarchate broke the locks and took over the Holy Pokrov cathedral.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/apellyatsionnyy-sud-ne-pozvolil-zakryt-delo-o-zakhvate-khrama-upts-v-gribovitse>

Seizure of the Cathedral of Candlemas: Chronicle of the Trial (UKRAINE)

February 26, 2016 - The Cathedral of Candlemas which is being built in Konstantinovka (Ukraine, Donetsk Region) was seized by representatives of the 'Kyiv Patriarchate' on the 14th of October 2015. The diocese of Gorlovka filed a lawsuit seeking to settle this issue in accordance with the Ukrainian law, as reports diocese official website.

A hearing on the seizure of the Cathedral of Candlemas by representatives of 'Kyiv Patriarchate' was held in the Economic Court of Donetsk Region in Kharkov on February 26, 2016. Diocese contacted Yuri Zakharchenko – the counsel representing Gorlovka diocese in court and asked him the following questions:

When did you file the case on the seizure of the Cathedral of Candlemas?

The case was filed on 10 December 2015 and this is when the court admitted it for hearing.

How many hearings have already taken place and what was decided?

We had four hearings so far but the court has not actually proceeded to the consideration of the case as we were collecting evidence and necessary official documents concerning the church from public authorities.

How did you phrase the claim – that is to say, what are we aiming at?

We are aiming at the annulment of the adopted decisions, namely those of the replacement of the managing staff of the church and the delivery of the church to the 'Kyiv Patriarchate'.

What was discussed during the hearing on 23 February 2016?

During that hearing the court discussed procedural points. It has not yet proceeded to the consideration of the case; it is just undertaking preparatory actions. As the case is a difficult and high-profile one, it was decided to consider it en banc before three judges (previously it was heard by a single judge). The trial started by the diocese of Gorlovka puts forward two questions: one concerning the replacement of the managing staff of the church performed by Y. Shapran in April 2015 and the other concerning the change of the confessional affiliation of the church.

I would like to mention that the question on the replacement of the managing staff was filed as a separate case, therefore, there will be two trials – one on the managing staff and the other on the change of the confessional

affiliation.

We have already filed the second case and are waiting for the court's procedural decision (concerning the initiation of the proceeding) expected to be adopted during the next week.

What was undertaken in the court?

I requested the two cases to be heard together. The counsel of the 'Kyiv Patriarchate' objected to this proposal. Normally, when a question arises during a hearing, the judge considers the opinions of representatives of all parties, so was done. Eventually, the court decided to settle the issue during the next hearing which will take place on 15 March 2016, and did not adopt any decision.

Actually the court has not yet proceeded to the consideration of the case. What steps were taken from the date of the filing of the case? At the very first hearing we requested that the court examine all the documentation contained in the registration file of the moral person – the cathedral, that is all documentation concerning its history. The court granted our request. In fact, two hearings were interrupted as the documents of the registration file could not reach the court because of the structural subdivision of the Ministry of Justice. We have finally got the documents before the following hearing on 8 February 2016 and we requested the hearing to be postponed in order to have time to examine them. Now we can proceed to the consideration of the case as all evidence is collected and we can use them in the court.

Sources

<http://gorlovka-eparhia.com.ua/zahvat-sretenskogo-hrama-hronika-sudebnogo-razbiratelstva/>

Unjust decision of the Ministry of culture of Ukraine about the use of an ancient Orthodox cathedral (UKRAINE)

February 21, 2016 - The Ukrainian authorities gave the permission to the so-called Kiev Patriarchate to use a chapel in the honor of the prince Yaroslav the Wise, inside the Church of Saint Sophia (God's Wisdom), as the website pravlife reports.

By this decision the Ministry of culture of Ukraine provoked conflicts between the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) and the State. Representative of the UOC (MP) spoke about the incident on the website romfea. "This that happened today was out of limits and the entrance of the schematics in Saint Sophia will cause the loss of very important relics", underlined the representative of the UOC.

One of the bishops of the so-called Patriarchate of Kiev commented that "this was a historical event for the Ukrainian State and the Church".

Sources

<http://pravlife.org/content/raskolniki-osvyatili-trapeznyy-hram-sofii-kievskoy>

Representatives of Ukrainian Orthodox Church meet with Human Rights Ambassador from Kingdom of the Netherlands (UKRAINE)

February 19, 2016 - in the Ecclesiastical archaeological office of the Kyiv Theological Academy representatives of the Synodal Departments of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church met with the Human Rights Ambassador from the Kingdom of

the Netherlands Mr. Kees van Baar.

As the official website of the Department of External Church Relations reports, the highly esteemed guest was accompanied by Ms. Minke van der Sar, Policy Officer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Department (The Hague), and Ms. Kateryna Ostashkova, Senior Policy Officer at the Governance and Human Rights Department, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Kyiv. With the blessing of His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufriy of Kyiv and all Ukraine, the Head of the Department for information and education of the UOC His Grace Bishop Klyment of Irpin, the Deputy Chairman of the Department for external Church relations (DECR UOC) archpriest Mykolay Danylevych, DECR UOC staff-member Mr. D. P. Lozynskyi, and Head of the Legal Department of the UOC Archpriest Oleksandr Bakhov took part in the meeting.

The main theme of the meeting was the state of compliance of believers' rights in Ukraine. During the discussion Mr Ambassador was told about specific cases of the violation of UOC believers' rights in certain Western regions of the country. In particular, among other cases mentioned, the current situation connected with the church in the village of Ptycha was described at length. The church is located in oblast' of Rivne where the local UOC religious community has won two court rulings regarding the question of legal ownership of the church, but the decisions of these courts are being ignored by local authorities as well as by the "UOC KP" representatives who continue to attempt to violently seize the church. Thus, the UOC parishioners are illegally denied use of their own church.

His Grace Bishop Klyment of Irpin also emphasized that the only desire of the UOC was the implementation of the constitutional rights of its believers. "Our Church treats with respect the ownership of property belonging to other faiths and religious organizations and would very much appreciate that this respect was reciprocated", said His Grace.

The diplomat from the Netherlands was provided with printed and video evidences where the above-mentioned violations were recorded.

After being acquainted with the situation, Mr. Kees van Baar noted that he knows about the ineffectiveness of the governmental authorities in Ukraine from his own personal experience: "Both your experience and my experience have been showing us that the rule of the law is not being complied with in your country", and he added: "personally, I fail to comprehend how rulings made by the courts are not executed". The Ambassador made assurances that he will make every effort to correct this situation at the international level.

Sources

<http://vzcz.church.ua/en/2016/02/22/kyiv-representatives-of-ukrainian-orthodox-church-meet-with-human-rights-ambassador-from-kingdom-of-the-netherlands/>

Illegal position of the Ukrainian government on the use of building of an ancient Cathedral of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)

February 19, 2016 - The Minister of Culture of Ukraine, Mr. V.Kirilenko said during the session of the Parliamentary Assembly,

that the he will allow to the non-canonical Kiev Patriarchate to celebrate the services in the church of Saint Sophia, which is now a museum and belongs to the State, as the website uoj reports.

The Minister of Culture asked from the Ministry Council their approval for this concession to the Kiev Patriarchate and he said that such a decision will have a great importance for Ukraine.

Representatives of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church spoke to the website romfea and they said that the government illegally gives to the non-canonical church the right to take under their jurisdiction this temple. It is mentioned that the former Metropolitan of Kiev Vladimir (1992-2014) had asked many times from the Ukrainian State to return the cathedral of Saint Sophia to the canonical Orthodox Church of Ukraine but the authorities rejected all his petitions.

Sources

<http://www.romfea.gr/epikairoti-ta-xronika/6551-i-kubernisi-tis-oukranias-dinei-stous-sxismatikous-tin-agia-sofia>

The court found illegal the transaction of the Orthodox church in a village to Kiev Patriarchate (UKRAINE)

February 11, 2016 - The religious community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in the village Mil'cha of Dubno district, Rivne region, was able to challenge in the court the decision of the village council, which has helped the community of Kiev Patriarchate to seize illegally the temple. The judge issued a ruling according to which the decision of the village council of

Mil'cha about changing the postal address of the church is recognized as an excess of functions, as the Union of the Orthodox Journalists reports.

The litigation continued for nearly six months. The last point in the application was put when on the proposal of the chairman of the village council the members of the executive committee of the council were invited to the court as witnesses. On the 3rd of February, the day of the hearing, they made controversial statements that they didn't take this decision at all, and the new address of the church is essentially not appropriated.

"Now in assigning postal addresses to the buildings in the Ukrainian legislation there is a gap. Such issues are usually resolved at the local level through the adoption of appropriate order assigning postal addresses, otherwise is used the principle analogy of law. "On the 11th of February, the Village council Mil'cha gave a new postal address to the church building, at the demand signed by ten persons who are not the owners of the building and do not have any documentation on it", commented the lawyer of the case Ekaterina Ivanyuk.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/sud-priznal-nezakonnymi-makhinatsii-upts-kp-v-sele-milcha-rovenskoy-oblasti>

Kiev City Council decided that the petition for the transfer of the Lavra to the Kiev Patriarchate is illegal (UKRAINE)

February 17, 2016 - The City Council of Kiev (Ukraine) withdrew without consideration the petition on the transfer of Kyiv Pechersk Lavra from the Ukrainian

Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) to Kiev Patriarchate, as this initiative is not in conformity with current legislation, as the website prochurch.ua reports.

The e-petition is out of responsibility of the City Council, and its content is contrary to the existing legislation. Therefore, the Standing Committee of Kiev City Council has decided that that the e-petition “for collection of signatures on transitioning Kiev Pechersk Lavra from the Moscow Patriarchate to Kiev Patriarchate” is not in accordance with law without consideration.

This emphasized the special Committee of Cabinet members who, on behalf of Mayor Vitali Klitschko, considered the content of the petition.

The Kiev City Council said that the e-petition does not meet the standards of the law, because its implementation may inflame religious hatred among the followers of the Kiev Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Recall that the petition for the collection of signatures for the transfer to the Kiev Patriarchate gathered 13,538 votes, while the petition for carrying out collecting signatures for the preservation of the sanctuary in the submission of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church 20,495 votes in less than a day.

Sources

<http://pro.church.ua/2016/02/17/kijivska-miska-rada-nazvala-peticiyu-pro-peredachu-kijevo-pecherskoji-lavri-upc-kp-nezakonnoyu/>

Kyiv Patriarchate takeover attempt of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church community (UKRAINE)

February 15, 2016 - In the village Ozertsy, Gorokhovsky district of Volyn region, the priest of the Kyiv Patriarchate launched a campaign for the conversion to the Kyiv Patriarchate and tried to organize a gathering of villagers for the “conversion” as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

Among the arguments of the activists of the Kyiv Patriarchate against community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC MP) community were holding services in Church Slavonic language and allegedly “money transactions to Moscow.”

“All those talks about money transactions to Moscow are nonsense and the money is probably not even getting through to Lutsk (editor’s note: the administrative center of Volyn region) but it doesn’t prove anything, we don’t sing in Turkish”, – the chorus girl of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church community Tatyana Sheremet commented on the claims of the Kyiv Patriarchate.

Supporters of the Kyiv Patriarchate suggested that the prior of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church community should be under the Kyiv Patriarchate’s jurisdiction. Among those who support the idea of conversion to the Kyiv Patriarchate is the daughter of the former head of the collective farm.

“No one has claims against me in the village, though they are suggesting that

I should convert to the Kyiv Patriarchate, otherwise they will take another measures,” – said Archpriest Mikhail Kurpil.

On Sunday some residents of the village planned gatherings near the church

to attempt its conversion to the Kyiv Patriarchate. However, they found a common language with the villagers supporting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and went home after the Sunday service. Only a few of the Kyiv Patriarchate activists together with fellow believers that were brought to the village from another parts of Ukraine organized one more prayer outdoors.

It is to be recalled that usually after the gathering of the villagers the followers of the Kyiv Patriarchate make an attempt to take over the church instead of the peaceful gathering of the religious community.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/v-sele-ozertsy-svyashchennik-upts-kp-nachal-reyderskie-deystviya-protiv-obshchiny-upts>

Villagers of Bukovini filled up a trench, made for the construction of a church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UKRAINE)

March 10, 2016 - A conflict was provoked in Bukovini village (Ukraine) by the decision to build a new church in the village of Kibaki, Vizhnitskiy region, as Young Bukovinetc reports. Some villagers were against the construction of the church because they already have one there, which belongs to the Kiev Patriarchate, as the website molbuk reports.

‘There are 15 families there, which belong to the Moscow Patriarchate, and they decided to build the church’, – said Father Alexander Fushtey, Superior of the Church of the Patronage of the Mother of God of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, at Kibaki village, in Vizhnitskiy region, – ‘Yet, people, living in the village, arranged meetings,

where they voted against another church in the village’.

According to the priest, the villages have already dug a trench where they were going to build the new church. The place was to be blessed on 8 March.

‘The blessing was set on 8 March, trenches were made’, – explained A.Fushtey. – Yet the villagers who were against it filled them up. It even led to a meeting.

‘A war is looming’, – warned the priest. ‘According to the common sense, our soldiers shouldn’t be killed, and churches of the Moscow Patriarchate should be built on and on. So, I think that people will come out for the construction of the church again’.

Sources

http://molbuk.ua/chernovtsy_news/107341-na-bukovyni-obureni-selyany-zasypaly-transheyu-pid-budivnyctvo-cerkvy-moskovskogo-patriarkhatu.html

A Ukrainian politician is accused of non-patriotism because he got married in a temple of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (UKRAINE)

March 12, 2016 - Anatoly Gritsenko, ex -Defense Minister, expressed his discomfort during a press conference in Lviv (Ukraine). He considers as immoral and groundless the accusations of non-patriotism for getting married in a temple of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the individuals who expressed such accusations as “people without Christ, as reports the website Glavkom.

“Honestly, I didn’t think that in Lviv, in the city which in many aspects is the closest to Europe, the question “who goes to what church” would arise. Still, we are going to

Europe, but not back to Bolshevism. In Europe people, their rights and freedoms are valued by the state“, said Mr. Gritsenko.

He explained why he chose the Ukrainian Orthodox Church: “My wife Julia Bridge (editor in chief of the publication” The Mirror of the Week”) and I got married in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church where we had been baptized, as well as our parents and children. We did not go to the Russian Orthodox Church in order to be baptized and instead went to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church whose parishioners are millions of Ukrainian citizens, including those who died on the Maidan and those who are now in the line. I believe we must respect the choice of every person. We go to church to communicate with God. It’s our choice. I think that there shouldn’t be any division between right or wrong churches.”

He told about his experience with the bishops of the Christian Churches of Ukraine in the period 1997-2007, when he was co-chairman of the permanent round table “Authority and religion” and then became Defense Minister.

“I’m sure that none of them would have addressed such accusations against me or my wife, “he assured.

Sources

<http://glavcom.ua/news/367698.html>

A priest of the Kyiv Patriarchate attempted to provoke the capture of a church belonging to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (UKRAINE)

March 15, 2016 - In Ivanopol village of Chudnovski region (Ukraine), a priest of the Kyiv Patriarchate attempted to incite

the residents to capture a church belonging to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. This action was, however, prevented through the joint efforts of the local authorities and the representatives of the UOC. The present information was provided by the archpriest Stephan Perig, responsible for the settlement of interfaith conflicts in Zhitomir, as the website uoj reports.

According to Father Sptephan, the priest of the UOC-KP, ‘Father Ivan’ initiated a collection of signatures ‘to associate the UOC community with the Kyiv Patriarchate’ under the latter’s legislation. Furthermore, he proposed that not only the residents of the relevant village put their signatures, but also the residents of other localities. These actions of the priest provoked the indignation of the UOC community, which resulted in a conflict.

Village residents, the representatives of both communities and the local authorities met on March 11 to discuss the issue of the foundation of the community of the Kyiv Patriarchate and the property rights over the cathedral of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos. After the general discussion, the representatives of both communities come together in the office of the head of the village council where they reached a consensus.

Believers of the Kyiv Patriarchate, except several aggressive speeches, accepted not to try to take the cathedral from the UOC community and to build a new one. The village council will allocate a piece of land for this purpose; the UOC community in turn will provide the possible support to the construction.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/otnosheniya-konfessij/v-ivanopole-zhitomirskoy-oblasti-svyashchennik-kievskogo-patriarkhata-pytalsya-sprovotsirovat-zakhva>

Local party prevents the construction of churches of the UOC in Kiev (UKRAINE)

March 28, 2016 - In an interview with Gazeta.ua the journalist Lana Samohvalova revealed why the Ukrainian Orthodox Church does not receive land for church construction in Kiev.

During the interview, the journalist said that no land allocation is performed in Kiev, as it is strictly monitored by political party "Svoboda". 'Authorities in Kiev do not allocate land to the UOC MP any more. It is strictly monitored by "Svoboda", and not only,'- said Samohvalova.

According to her, this information was received from the former spokesman of 'Svoboda', Yuri Sirotyuk. 'Yuri Sirotyuk confessed to me that the allocation of land is blocked in Kyiv City Council.'

Sources

<http://gazeta.ua/articles/life/na-cerkovne-vidyednannya-ukrayini-vid-moskvi-potribno-1020-rokiv/694779>

Court decision in favor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (UKRAINE)

April 8, 2016 - On April 6 Rivne Regional Administrative court rejected the claim of the Kyiv Patriarchate on transfer of the Holy Protection Church in Ryasniki village for alternate use, reports the press service of the Rivne eparchy of the UOC.

A human rights activist of Rivne eparchy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church said that the church in Ryasniki village, Goshcha district, is an architectural monument of local importance, and was therefore transferred

to the UOC religious community for use in 1991.

He also noted that lawyer of the UOC-KP in Ryasniki village L.Toros misinterpreted P. 3 Art.17 "On freedom of conscience and religious organizations".

"According to the practice of the Supreme Court of Ukraine, a religious building, which is in legitimate use by the religious community, cannot be transferred to the alternate use by two or more religious communities under the procedure determined by Part 3 Art.17 of the mentioned Law, prior to the termination of the previous agreement in the manner and on the grounds stipulated by the civil legislation of Ukraine ", said the lawyer of the Rivne eparchy of the UOC.

The court case has lasted since October 2015, when the newly formed community of the Kyiv Patriarchate filed a claim in Rivne Regional Administrative Court for the obligations of the Rivne Regional State Administration to transfer the church of the UOC in Ryasniki village for alternate use by the UOC and the UOC-KP.

The reason for the claim was that the Rivne Regional State Administration did not consider their letter with the requirement for alternate use. Now the court, having refused to transfer the church for alternate use, ordered the Rivne Regional State Administration to provide an answer to the letter by the Kiev Patriarchate.

Sources

<http://rivne.church.ua/2016/04/07/garna-zvistka-na-blagovishhennya-sud-vidxliv-pozov-kijivskogo-patriarxatu-shhodo-xramu-v-seli-ryasniki/>

Turkish Cypriot side restricts Orthodox church services in north (CYPRUS)

May 24, 2016 - All Orthodox churches in the north will only be able to have religious ceremonies once a year from now on except for Apostolos Andreas, Apostolos Barnabas and Ayios Mamas following a new policy by the 'foreign ministry' in the north, as reports Cyprus Mail.

Speaking to Turkish Cypriot newspaper Kibris, the 'minister' Tahsin Ertugruloğlu said it was a matter of restricting the ceremonies rather than forbidding them.

The affected churches will be able to conduct one religious service a year either on Christmas, Easter or the Name Day of the church year.

According to the 'ministry undersecretary' Mustafa Lakadamyali, the decision was taken to prevent "the exploitation of this right", adding that they have constant requests for name day ceremonies and the Turkish Cypriot police have to take measures in the area for every religious ceremony.

He said police needed to be in place at different churches on the same day taking security measures during the religious ceremonies and there were problems in bringing religious icons to the north.

Thus the criteria for the permissions of the religious ceremonies were reviewed, he said.

Lakadamyali also claimed that Greek Cypriot authorities do not give permission to all 'TRNC citizens' to cross to the government-controlled area of Cyprus, even if it is a religious ceremony.

He clarified that there were no restrictions regarding Maronites.

Kibris also reported that Serdar Atai, on behalf of the NGO 'Famagusta Initiative' criticised this decision, saying this was a serious blow to the constructive dialogue and to the rapprochement process in Cyprus.

He added that 'such chauvinism' was not accepted at a time where the two leaders declared their full support to any kind of dialogue, and the religious leaders take a liberal stance. He expressed his belief that the religious ceremonies help renew old friendships between Greek and Turkish Cypriots.

Atai concluded saying that Ertugruloğlu was also damaging to the positive atmosphere in Cyprus.

Leader of the Turkish Resistance organization (TMT), Yilmaz Bora, in a written statement, criticised the 'Famagusta Initiative' for criticising Ertugruloğlu, Kibris said.

Bora was quoted as saying it was not possible to live with the Greek Cypriots in a United Cyprus, because the mentality of the Greek Cypriots has not changed in 53 years.

Burak Mavis, secretary of the Turkish Cypriot Teachers' Trade Union (KTOS) criticised both Ertugruloğlu's and TMT's statements saying it was a shame to attack people who spoke using the language of peace, adding that within the framework of the religious and conscious freedom, it was not possible to have a policy in a modern world by restricting permission of religious ceremonies. He said that this is a backwards and racist political mentality.

Sources

<http://cyprus-mail.com/2016/05/24/turkish-cypriot-side-restricts-orthodox-church-services-north/>

In Rivne the Kyiv Patriarchate didn't let the priest and the believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church enter the cemetery (UKRAINE)

May 4, 2016 - The activists of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) threatened with throwing the car belonging to a priest into the river if he tried to perform a memorial service at the graves of deceased relatives of the believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), as reports press-service of UOC.

On May 4 in the village of Kamenica, Dubno district, Rivne region the supporters of the "Kyiv Patriarchate" – locals and radically-minded men from the district center – blocked the passage to the cemetery so that the priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church couldn't enter, as reported by the Information – Educational Department of the UOC, with reference to the press-service of the Rivne diocese.

The priest was prevented from performing a memorial service on the graves of deceased relatives of the UOC believers.

As the Rivne eparchy informs, at the request of the parishioners of the UOC the Archpriest John Savchuk, Prior of the Holy Protection Church in the neighboring village of Podluzie, came to the village of Kamenica. On the road he came across a crowd of aggressive people, who demanded to leave the village and not to go to the cemetery, threatened him with throwing his car into the river.

The locals don't have their own church, therefore they have to go to a church in the neighboring village because in the nineties the "Kyiv Patriarchate" "transferred" under

its own jurisdiction the church that was just founded.

The UOC believer Maria, who came to pray for the souls of her loved ones, states that the current situation is beyond common sense.

"We were allowed to enter the cemetery, but the priest wasn't. Arguing that there is a priest in the village, he is the one who should pray for the repose. This is a blasphemy on their part, because the supporters of Kyiv Patriarchate are well aware that we have our own view on this issue", – she said.

Entrance to the village cemetery was blocked for several hours by dissenters. In the meantime, the local authorities and police remained on the sidelines, not suppressing illegal actions of the activists of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate.

In order to pray for the repose of the souls of the dead villagers, the priest and the faithful of the UOC served requiem in the middle of the road.

Sources

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<http://news.church.ua/2016/05/04/na-rovenshhine-kievskij-patriarxat-ne-pustil-na-kladbishhe-svyashhennika-i-veruyushhix-upc/?lang=ru#more-68966>

Men in camouflage and balaclavas seized UOC church in Ukraine (UKRAINE)

June 10, 2016 - In the village of Kolosovaya, Ukraine, the unknown in camouflage uniforms came to the church of the UOC and cut the locks. The parishioners believe that their church is going to transfer to the

Kiev Patriarchate. Today was announced the court's decision on the re-registration of the religious community of the village, as reports UOJ.

“The Lviv Administrative Court rejected the appeal of the religious community, which considered illegal to change its jurisdiction from the UOC to UOC-KP, – commented the lawyer. – However, there is no decision on the transfer of the Church of St. John the Evangelist to anyone at the moment. Therefore, someone who cuts the locks or in any other way prevents the believers to serve in the church violates the law. We, in our turn, prepared a complaint to be filed to the Constitutional Court.”

“The parishioners tried to prevent people in camouflage from cutting the locks of the church, – says senior priest Anatoly Simora. – But they wouldn't listen. It is not easy to argue with armed men.”

The confronting of the UOC community of Kolosovaya village with those who wanted to take possession of their church began when the chairman of the Ternopil Regional State Administration Stepan Barna decided to transfer the UOC parish to the UOC-KP. It happened on August 28, 2015. Since then, the faithful have not abandoned their attempts to regain their status.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/zashchita-tserkvi/in-kolosovaya-the-unknown-in-camouflage-and-balaclavas-seized-uoc-church>

Procession of the Orthodox Believers on the Ascension Day disrupted (UKRAINE)

June 9, 2016 - In the urban-type village of Kozelets, Chernihiv region, Ukraine, near the Church of the Ascension representatives

of the Kiev Patriarchate have clashed with parishioners of the UOC, as reports the correspondent of UOJ.

In the morning representatives of the KP arrived in the village by bus to serve in the Church of the Ascension. Along with them came people in camouflage, who unfolded banners of the battalion “Azov” and “Aydar”. “Guests” interfere with the annual religious procession that is made by the parishioners of the UOC.

“In Kozelets believers are supporters of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, so schismatics had to “hire” parishioners from the outside, commented the Dean of Kozelets district archpriest Mikhail Tereshchenko. – Kozelets religious community of the UOC has been seeking permission to hold services in the Church of the Ascension for 23 years, but each time has been denied. The authorities referred to the fact that they have nowhere to move the weaving museum exhibits, the exposition has been displayed in the church all these years. Annually, on the Ascension Day the UOC community walked around the Church of the Ascension. Now under the feet of parishioners flew firecrackers from the supporters of the KP. Agitation with the calls “Drive out the priests of Moscow” is on a go.

The UOC parishioners believe that all indicates that the representatives of the KP are intended to seize and assign the Church of the Ascension – a unique monument of Ukrainian architecture, which since the Soviet period has been a weaving museum.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/in-kozelets-filaret-followers-and-voluntary-combatants-seek-to-counter-procession-of-the-uoc>

Village head provokes conflict between communities of UOC and UOC-KP (UKRAINE)

June 2, 2016 - The village head of Milcha village, Dubno district, Rivne region, Ukraine, provokes conflict between the two religious communities – of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and of the UOC-KP. The confrontation is caused by the decision of Zhytomyr Administrative Court of Appeal, which confirmed the right of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church community to the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin in vil. Milcha, seized by the Kiev Patriarchate, reports the UOJ correspondent.

The meeting in Zhytomyr Administrative Court of Appeal took place on 1 June. The court, once again, confirmed the illegal use of the church by the religious community of the UOC-KP.

At the court hearing, local officials promoting the interests of the UOC-KP behaved provocatively. Milcha village head Yuri F. Mishchuk attended the court, accompanied by several local deputies and the “superior” of the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin seized last year. According to eyewitnesses, the official behaved aggressively, slandered and gave false testimony – even the judge had to make objections.

The conflict has lasted from 22 December, 2015. The Economic Court of Rivne region issued a decision, according to which the community of the UOC-KP was ordered to remove obstacles in the use of the church to the faithful of the UOC, which has the title right.

Despite all the judicial decisions, the church, which belongs to the religious community of the UOC of Milcha village, is still available

for use by the Kiev Patriarchate. So far none of the district or regional officials has intervened in the case to comply with the judgment, and the chairman of the village council regularly provokes discord between the two communities.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/zashchita-tserkvi/another-confrontation-in-milcha-village-head-provokes-conflict-between-communities-of-uoc-and-uoc-kp>

In Zhitomir radicals insulted believers of Orthodox Cross Procession (UKRAINE)

July 18, 2016 - The Cross Procession, moving from the Pochaev Lavra, has been confronted by aggressively-minded nationalists today. According to the participants of the Procession, a conflict was avoided due to the militaries of the 95th brigade, as reports UOJ.

As reported by the believers, going in the Cross Procession, about 40 people, shouting obscenities, tried to disrupt the movement of the column.

“Real patriots of Ukraine helped to calm the radicals, – says Fr. Victor Zemlianoy, a participant of the Cross Procession. – When the shouters saw the militaries of the 95th brigade, who took part in the battle for the Donetsk airport, join us, the screamers, as they say, “swallowed their tongues.”

The Cross Procession was attended by six soldiers of the 95th military brigade.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/in-zhitomir-radicals-insulted-believers-of-cross-procession-video>

<http://zhytomyr-eparchy.org/uk/onovleno-u-zhytomyr-prybuvs-eukrayinsky-hresnyy-hid-myru-lyubovi-ta-molytvy-za-ukrayinu.html>

Pilgrims of All Ukrainian Orthodox Cross Procession blocked in Odessa (UKRAINE)

July 26, 2016 - at 20:07 near Odessa, in the church of the village of Aleksandrovka, Odessa “Automaidan” activists blocked people travelling from Odessa to Kiev to join the All-Ukrainian Cross Procession, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

The Odessa resident Lada Laferova wrote on her Facebook page that Automaidan blocked the Odessa pilgrims: “They blocked and not released people. Among them there are a lot of women,” shared the Oddesite.

On the official website of the “Automaidan” activists urged if possible to damage buses: “When you see the bus: block it, cut the tires or throw a brick into a windshield!” – said the message. On the “Automaidan” page in the social network there have also reported the bus numbers of pilgrims to “declare hunting for”.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/odessa-automaidan-blocks-pilgrims-of-cross-procession>

Nationalists tried to disrupt Orthodox Cross Procession (UKRAINE)

July 16, 2016 - The religious procession, moving from the Holy Dormition Svyatogorsk Lavra, was again awaited by nationalists by the roadside. The faithful were subjected to threatening, insulting words and behaviour. Right-wing radicals, shouting nationalist slogans, tried to disrupt the prayer for peace in Ukraine, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

The nationalists were waiting for participants of the Cross Procession near the church in the town of Khorol (Poltava region), where the pilgrims were celebrating the liturgy.

“The believers accept attacks by right-wing forces with calmness and humility – says Archimandrite Iosaph (Kovetsky), the head of the Procession. – We do not give in to attempts to turn a religious procession into political action. All their efforts achieve the opposite effect: a prayer for peace is only strengthening.”

Protesters against the Procession for peace have resorted to provocations. In particular, the Khorol church today was attended by a woman with an icon of the Virgin, on the back side which there was a portrait of Yulia Timoshenko in the image of the Mother of God. Holding this kind of “icon” the woman was photographed along with the rest of the faithful.

Many pilgrims feel sorry for their opponents. “They might feel hot, standing here in the sun,” – assumed one of the participants of the Cross Procession. She even came to the people with offensive placards and offered some kvass. The drink was rejected.

This is not the first attempt of right-wing radicals to disrupt the Cross Procession.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/nationalists-try-to-turn-cross-procession-into-political-action-video>

Nationalists attempt to interfere with All-Ukraine sacred procession (UKRAINE)

July 13, 2016 - The All-Ukraine Orthodox procession, which is heading from the direction of Donbass, from the Svyatogorsk

Monastery, came under attack of radicals from Right Sector, an extremist organization banned in Russia, as reports Interfax.

As the website of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate reported, a total of 20 nationalists marched in a parallel to the Christians and interrupted the prayer for peace with shouts and insults. Moreover, the far-right extremists drove in constant close proximity to the sacred procession.

The nationalists marched parallel to the procession holding red and black banners. According to witnesses, the radicals shouted slogans, alternating them with obscenities addressed towards the participants in the procession.

The participants in the procession were filmed and threatened. Some of the nationalists attempted to break through the procession to the sacred relics, but were prevented from doing so.

The All-Ukraine sacred procession with the prayer for peace in Ukraine started in the east of the country from the Svyatogorsk Monastery on July 3, and in the west of the country from the Pochaev Monastery on July 9. The participants in both processions will meet in Kiev at St. Vladimir Hill and will walk together to the Kiev Pechersk Laura, where a ceremonial service will be held on July 27, the eve of the celebration of Christianization of the Kievan Rus Day.

As reported, Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada Chairman Andrey Paruby said recently that among the participants in the sacred procession are not only civilians, but also provocateurs with banned symbols, and that the event itself will be used by the Kremlin for provocations on the streets of Kiev on July 26.

In turn, Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine made a stand against the attempts to divide the Ukrainian citizens into 'patriots' and 'separatists.'

For his part, Vakhtang Kipshidze, deputy head of the Synodal Department for Church, Society and Media Relations, told Interfax-Religion that the attempts to use against the All-Ukraine sacred procession "political horror stories may be made only by those people who never participated in sacred processions and hold notions of the life of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church based on the fantasies understood only by themselves."

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13093>

Ukrainian nationalists make a provocation during the all-Ukrainian orthodox cross procession (UKRAINE)

July 13, 2016 - On the evening of July 12 young people in camouflage from "the Right Sector" extremist group along with paid activists arranged a provocation during the all-Ukrainian cross procession on the way from Svyatogorsk to Kiev, reports pravoslavie.ru website.

On that day the cross procession participants were to walk from Valki to Chudovo and finally reach Poltava.

At the border of the Kharkiv and Poltava regions the faithful were met aggressively by extremists in automobiles along with several members of the Azov battalion. A column of the provocateurs walked parallel to the pilgrims, crying out rude insulting slogans and all sorts of slander, intimidating

the faithful, and defiantly filming their own provocation.

The believers did not respond to the provocation and were peacefully waiting for the arrival of Metropolitan Philip of Poltava and Myrhorod at the regions' border.

Later, on their arrival to Chudovo where a prayer service was performed at a local church and food was prepared, the provocateurs continued loudly insulting the Orthodox pilgrims with impunity. Eventually, however, they hid their radical attributes and dispersed. The cross procession participants were greatly astonished that the locals who had taken part in the provocation received monetary reward from "the Right Sector" for their "action". The Orthodox pilgrims were even more amazed when after it was all over, some of the provocateurs joined them for dinner at the same table!

The cross procession participants are currently moving towards Poltava.

Sources

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/95356.htm>

Ukrainian MP is trying to grab a UOC church from the parish (UKRAINE)

August 9, 2016 - In Bershad city, Vinnitsa region, deputy of the VR of Ukraine Anatoliy Matviyenko decided to take away the church from the local faithful he had helped to build and to transfer it as a gift to the municipal authorities, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

The deputy is set to expropriate it from the UOC community and give it to Bershad

city council. At the same time the politician makes a condition that local authorities have the right to transfer the church to any confession for use until the "One Local Ukrainian Church" has been created. It is said in the draft grant agreement.

Reportedly, such decision of the MP on granting the church to local self-government authorities with its further rent by any denomination is explained by the new tendency of the Ukrainian politicians – support of non-canonical churches.

Parishioners of the Holy Dormition of the Mother of God offered to buy the church out by means of donation-raising by the whole diocese. Now the congregation continues to conduct worship services in the church and is waiting for a reply from Anatoliy Matviyenko as for the possibility to grant the church for a free long-term leasing.

Bershad city council at the session of 5 August 2016, during which there was to be discussed an initiative of Mr. Matviyenko, declined approving of the agreement until some disputable legal and other provisions had been settled.

It will be reminded that 4 years ago cleric of Tulchin diocese archpriest Oleg Murakhovskiy sanctified the land for the church construction – a gift from the MP who voluntarily helped to build the UOC community church. However, it was known that both the land and the already erected working church is the property of the Verkhovna Rada deputy.

Prior to that the politician had requested Metropolitan of Tulchin and Bratslav Ionafan to appoint senior priest in the church for regular worship services. Upon the MP's consent the Holy Dormition church was

granted an honorable status of Archbishop's Metochion.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/a-deputy-from-vinnitsa-is-trying-to-grab-a-uoc-church-he-helped-to-build-from-the-parish>

150 pilgrims prevented from visiting the Orthodox church on Sunday (KOSOVO)

August 29, 2016 - Pristina and Belgrade officials condemned violent protests by Albanians who prevented Kosovo Serbs from visiting an Orthodox church in the western Kosovo village of Mushtisht/Mustiste, as reports balkaninsight.com.

"The scenes from the village of Mushtisht are completely unnecessary and unacceptable," said Kosovo President Hashim Thaci said in a statement after a protest by several hundred Albanians prevented some 150 Kosovo Serb pilgrims the visiting the Orthodox church in the village on Sunday.

"These actions are neither in the interest of Kosovo, nor in the interest of its citizens," Thaci added.

The Kosovo Albanians gathered in the centre of the village and clashed with police who tried to secure a safe passage for the Serbs' buses.

Protesters carrying banners with the slogan 'KLA' (Kosovo Liberation Army) threw rocks and bottles at the police. Several protesters were injured.

After several hours, the Serbs turned back because the police could not guarantee their security.

US and EU diplomats in Kosovo also condemned the violence.

"Strongly condemn using violence against police. Kosovo should be safe for all to practice their faith," US ambassador Greg Delawie wrote on Twitter.

The EU office in Kosovo said it was "concerned over Mushtisht/Musutiste incident today, commends police for preventing injuries and material damages."

It add that the office "understands war wounds, but respect for the right to return necessary for normalisation of relations in Kosovo".

The head of the Serbian government office for Kosovo, Marko Djuric, argued that the unrest showed that Kosovo is far from a "multi-ethnic society".

"Serbia doesn't see anything normal in a mass manifestation of hate towards Serbs who just wanted to gather at the remains of their houses and church to pay respect. If Serbs are not even allowed to do that, how can we even talk about a future perspective in Serb-Albanian relations?" Djuric said.

Mushtisht/Mustiste, which was mixed before 1999 war, was the scene of deadly violence and human rights abuses during the conflict. Many Albanians from the village are still missing.

After the peace agreement which ended the war in 1999, the remaining Serbs in the village were expelled or fled in fear of retaliation.

Since then, they have not been able to return to the village or to visit the church and their relatives' graves.

Thaci insisted that everyone has the right to

return to their country of origin and their property.

“This applies for every citizen of Kosovo, regardless of ethnicity,” he said.

“The issue of the missing, the displaced and occupied properties are open wounds from the war. We must close these wounds as soon as possible and face the future,” he added.

Branimir Stojanovic, Kosovo’s deputy prime minister, who travelled in a bus with the Serb pilgrims, accused the authorities of capitulating to the violence.

Stojanovic insisted that despite the unrest, Kosovo Serbs would continue to try to return to their former homes.

“Displaced Serbs will be persistent in coming back to their homes and rebuilding their destroyed properties, as well as 11 Orthodox churches which they went to before 1999,” he said.

Djuric said meanwhile that Serbia had warned about possible violence last week after a local youth organisation from Mushtisht/Mustiste put up a billboard with photos from the Kosovo war, expressing discontent about the Serbs’ possible return to the village.

The billboard with images of people killed and houses burned by Serbian forces during the conflict was installed after ten Serb families asked to come back under a plan drawn up by the Kosovo ministry for returns.

In 2014, several hundred Kosovo Albanians protesting about missing persons from the 1990s war prevented a busload of Serbs from attending a church service marking the Orthodox holiday of Velika Gospojina in Mushtisht/Mustiste.

The protesters held up placards with slogans like “Where are the missing persons of Mushtisht?” and “There is no room for criminals in Mushtisht”.

Suhareka/Suva Reka and its surrounding villages, including Mushtisht/Mustiste, were heavily targeted during the conflict, and many people are still missing.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia convicted six former Serbian officials of responsibility for wartime crimes committed during Kosovo war.

Serbian courts have convicted several people of committing crimes in Suhareka/Suva Reka.

Suhareka/Suva Reka police chief Radojko Repanovic and police officer Sladjan Cukaric were sentenced to 20 years in prison for their involvement.

Police officer Miroslav Petkovic and state security official Milorad Nisavic were given sentences of 13 and 15 years respectively.

However, no one has been prosecuted for the crimes committed in Mushtisht/Mustiste.

The return of some 200,000 Serbs who fled Kosovo after the war ended in 1999 has been slow, and so far only around 10,000 of them have gone back.

Sources

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-serbia-condemn-albanian-protest-against-serb-pilgrims-08-29-2016>

Radicals from the “Right Sector” admitted seizures of UOC churches in Ternopil region (UKRAINE)

August 22, 2016 - Due to the struggle of nationalists with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church “more than one parish in the

Ternopil region was returned.” This was said by Sapsan Sviatoslav, a member of the Stepan Bandera All-Ukrainian radical organization “Trizub (Trident)”, on his Facebook page, as reports UOJ.

“In connection with the danger that comes from the UOC-MP, we, Ukrainian nationalists, cannot stand aside. That is why we are fighting against the Kremlin agents in cassocks. Due to our actions more than one parish in the Ternopil region was returned to the Ukrainian church,” he said.

“We have taken on the challenge of expelling religious occupants from our land,” stressed the radical.

Recall, the organization “Trizub (Trident)” named after Stepan Bandera, which was created by Dmitry Yarosh, aims to promote the ideology of Ukrainian nationalism in the interpretation of Stepan Bandera, in any conditions by all available means and resources. The “Trident” initiated the creation of the “Right Sector”.

Sources

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<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/radicals-from-the-right-sector-admitted-seizures-of-uoc-churches-in-ternopil-region>

Kiev Patriarchate seized graveyard chapel of UOC MP (UKRAINE)

August 29, 2016 - The community of the UOC-KP in the village of Gribovitsa, Ivanichi district, Volyn region, did not confine itself to the seized Holy Protection Church of the UOC.

A few weeks ago, the locks of another religious building of the village, which belongs to the old architectural heritage, were

found replaced. On August 28, the Day of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, “the mysterious” situation suddenly cleared up: the supporters of the Kiev Patriarchate entered the chapel to serve in it, as reports UOJ.

The parish priest of Holy Protection communities of the UOC in Gribovitsa Archpriest Igor Margita reported about the fact of the replacement of locks to local law enforcement bodies. At the same time opponents of the UOC community traditionally accused him of changing the locks. However, representatives of the Kiev Patriarchate failed to explain how they possessed the keys to the locks in this case.

The graveyard chapel in Gribovitsa is a small religious building, which is a historic architectural landmark, as it was discovered by the UOC community long before the Kiev Patriarchate seized the Holy Protection Church. The preservation of this object has already been subject to heated disputes when some villagers without the permit of the relevant official bodies “repaired” the chapel.

With regard to his last appeal to the law enforcement bodies the priest of the UOC received the following reply from the police department: in the fact of the replacement of the locks on the chapel doors they found no reason to enter the incident into the Unified Register of the Pre-trial Investigations.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/in-volyn-village-gribovitsa-kyiv-patriarchate-seized-graveyard-chapel>

In Zhelobnoye village KP activists want to grab the UOC church (UKRAINE)

August 4, 2016 - According to the UOJ sources, in Zhelobnoye village of Zhitomir region (Ukraine) a religious conflict is burgeoning. Filaret adherents want to seize the UOC church of the Birth of the Mother of God. The church has existed for 257 years now.

There was held a congregation meeting at which the issue was brought up on the further church lot. There were proposed three variants: alternate services; to transfer the church to the KP community; to lock the church until the case is resolved in court proceedings.

«We tried to get it across to the attendees that the UOC community in the village functions according to the law. Lawlessness is the desire of certain people to seize the church,” tells protopriest Sergey Gritsaniuk, an authorized representative of Zhitomir diocese on regulating interfaith relations and protection of believers’ rights.

The UOC community in Zhelobnoye village was registered in 1991. In April of the current year there was registered a community of the Kiev Patriarchate. They were offered a land plot to build their own church and two buildings for temporary worship services at their choice until the church construction has been finished. The KP representatives rejected the proposals.

The Chair of the village council announced he will insist on holding referendum at which all members of the village community could express their

opinions as for the further church lot. Many villagers do not go to the church at all and do not belong to either of the congregations.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/in-zhelobnoye-village-kp-activists-want-to-grab-the-uoc-church>

Ukrainian law enforcers do not respond to the provocations around the UOC church (UKRAINE)

August 7, 2016 - The participants of the anti-church action of the “Right Sector” openly distributed the literature aimed at inciting interfaith hatred and who had earlier set up a stand containing slanderous information about the UOC around the only UOC church of St. Vera, Nadezhda, Lubov and their mother Sophia in Ternopol (Ukraine) during the Sunday worship service, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

Like it was during previous provocations, activists of the city organization “Right Sector” distributed plain leaflets on “sponsoring the war against Ukraine”. On top of that, the authors took efforts to tag a specific picture of Ternopol Cathedral to a standard “candle-bullet kit”.

According to lawyer of the UOC Ternopol diocese Andrey Zaharchuk, believers, being the aggrieved as a result of provocative actions, asked the law enforcers to stop lawlessness. In their opinion, it forms a part of the criminal proceeding, which was opened several days ago under a similar incident. Yet, the policemen referred to the fact the “Right Sector” event was allowed by the City Council.

A frontline police squad that arrived upon the UOC parishioners' call refused to cut lawlessness short and called an Operational Investigations Group. The UOC diocese employees accentuated the fact that a criminal action was taken a week ago in the aftermath of the "Right Sector" provocation. The law enforcers should have put a stop to actions which fully correspond to article 161 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine regarding violation of the believers' rights and stirring up religious hatred. However, they shrugged off numerous requests of the UOC believers to take away the stand with anti-church information and the violators themselves.

The investigator, who had come upon request, accepted another application on violation with signatures of the believers who were present at the church service and assured that the "activists will leave now". However, this scene lasted for over two hours with the police leaving the venue once the "Right Sector" had left it. As for passersby, they were not particularly attracted to the radicals' behavior.

On July 24 the "Right Sector" arranged for a similar action near the same Cathedral in Ternopol. The faithful also had to call the police.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/law-enforcers-do-not-respond-to-the-right-sector-provocations-around-the-uoc-church>

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/pravyi-sektor-razzhigayet-mezhkonfessionalnuyu-rozn-v-ternopole>

Provocation against the UOC faithful in Cherkassy (UKRAINE)

August 9, 2016 - Radicals arranged another provocation during the local orthodox cross procession in Cherkassy (Ukraine), as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

On that day there were held festivities dedicated to the appearance of the Mother of God above the future Archangel Michael's Cathedral. Upon the end of the Divine Liturgy there was held a Cross procession attended by many people, during which there were pronounced prayers for the peace in Ukraine.

As it is reported, the prayer session was spoiled by an action of some local activists from the "Right Sector" who picketed the Orthodox of Cherkassy city.

The radicals told on the site that the "procession was being supervised by the "Right Sector" nationalists of Cherkassy region.

"Quite absurd appears the situation when several radically minded activists try to control the procession that exceeds them tenfold and decide which faith is true. Not less surprising is the behavior of the law enforcers who let a bunch of semi-military informal grouping in balaclavas impede the believers of the biggest religious confession to exercise their constitutional right to freedom of faith," comments the Awareness-Raising Department.

It will be reminded that the activity of semi-military groupings has raised concerns in the European community for a long time now. In November 2015, reporting on the humanitarian situation in the East of Ukraine, Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe Nils Muižnieks said that "all military formations, which haven't been fully

integrated into regular armed forces or the police, and continue to act outside the regular Command, shall be subject to disarmament and dismissal without delay.” As it is known, armed groups of the “Right Sector” refused to make a part of the Armed Forces of Ukraine or Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Sources

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<http://news.church.ua/2016/08/10/pravij-sektor-vzhe-ponad-rik-rozpalyuje-mizhreligijnu-vorozhnechu-v-krajini-pravooxoronci-ne-vtruchayutsya/>

Attempt of seizure of Orthodox Church in Vinnitsa region (UKRAINE)

August 10, 2016 - Radical activists were set to grab a near-cemetery church of Saint Basil the Great from the UOC community in Vinnitsa region, Ukraine. According to the UOJ source, thanks to the priests' awareness-raising efforts, the radicals changed their mind.

The activists insisted that “there is no place for the Moscow Patriarchate on the Ukrainian lands.”

“At the congregation meeting we explained to the attendees that we represent the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – the only canonic organization in Ukraine. And the listeners understood our words. Basically, many problems seem to crop up because priests are unable to make it clear to citizens that we are not “Moscow” as it might loom to somebody, but absolutely the Ukrainian Church. Moreover, the only recognized Ukrainian Church in Ukraine,” tells archpriest Vasiliy Goncharuk, dean of Nemirov district of Tulchin diocese.

As a matter of fact, the UOC community in Nikiforovtsy village was registered in 2004.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/zashchita-tserkvi/in-nikiforovtsy-village-vinnitsa-region-believers-stood-up-for-their-church>

In Ternopil region right-wing radicals trying to influence court decisions on church property (UKRAINE)

September 22, 2016 - the Court of Appeal in the Ternopil region denied the community of the UOC in the village of Bashuky, Kremenets district, the right to dispose of its church. Thus, the previous decision of the Kremenets district court was reversed. Today, the community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is praying in a country house, deprived of registration and all related rights, as reports the union of the orthodox journalists.

The UOC community won the court of first instance, providing the appropriate arguments. However, according to the Commissioner for resolution of sectarian conflicts in the region, Archpriest George Prokopchuk, in the Ternopil region courts are now imposed practice of reviewing won claims of the UOC at the stage of appeal.

The UOC community of Bashuky, Kremenets district, as the parishioners of the other villages of the region, in which the authorities re-registered the statutes of religious communities, will defend the right to possession of church property in the courts until the European Court for Human Rights.

The situation is similar in the village Kolosova, where the Kyiv Patriarchate

received a decision of the Lviv Court of Appeal. In this case, the court hearings were constantly attended by the representatives of the “Right Sector”. On their pages in social networks, the right-wing organization has repeatedly said it will achieve the transfer of the churches to the Kyiv Patriarchate by “all available means”.

St. Archangel Michael’s Church in Bashuky was seized by the Kyiv Patriarchate supporters and raiders from the Right Sector in the summer of 2015. Then, as in vil. Kolosova, Kremenets district, the regional government made changes to the statutes of the community of the UOC, presenting it as a community of the Kyiv Patriarchate.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/in-ternopil-region-right-wing-radicals-trying-to-influence-court-decisions-on-church-property>

Albanians prevent Serbs from cleaning inside desecrated Orthodox Church (KOSOVO)

September 20, 2016 - A building inspection with the support of the municipal police in the Kosovo territory prevented Serbs from putting things in order inside the church of Christ the Savior in Pristina which had been desecrated by Albanians, reports the site pravoslavie.ru.

As soon as Serbs started removing rubbish and excrement from the desecrated temple which Albanians had turned into a public lavatory and refuge for drug addicts, the police appeared and demanded that they immediately stop the works “on unregistered premises.” However, when the house of God had earlier been set on fire and blown up by local Albanians the police

were not so prompt.

“The policemen told us that they arrived after receiving an application from local residents who had allegedly reported the illegal work inside the church,” one of the Serbs related.

The unfinished church of Christ the Savior in Pristina has been attacked many times over the past seventeen years, but the criminals have never been detained.

In 1999 there was an attempt to blow up the church, after which it was used as a toilet and a dump. Not long ago the church was set on fire, and following that incident representatives of the Diocese of Raska and Prizren intended to clean up everything inside it and to install iron doors.

Sources

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/97259.htm>

Orthodox church seized in western Ukraine (UKRAINE)

September 15, 2016 - Representatives of Kiev Patriarchate and the Right Sector (organization banned in Russia) captured St. Anna Church in the Kutly village in the Ternopol Region, Ukraine, as reports interfax-religion.

“Church raiders cut the lock and rushed into the church, not letting there the UOC believers, who are legal owners of the church,” press service of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church reports.

The church was closed about half a year ago when representatives of Kiev Patriarchate started regularly interrupting divine services of the local Orthodox community.

Today believers come to celebrate Divine Liturgies in a pavilion set up on a private territory.

From the beginning of the military actions in Ukraine representatives of the Kiev Patriarchate often supported by nationalists and local authorities seized several dozens of UOC churches.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13254>

<http://news.church.ua/2016/09/12/na-kijivshhini-prixilniki-upc-kp-znishhili-sporudu-nedobudovanogo-pravoslavного-xramu/>

Pristina Students Demand Orthodox Church Demolition (KOSOVO)

September 16, 2016 - A group of students at Pristina University has demanded that a Serbian Orthodox church that stands on the university campus should be demolished or turned into student facilities, as reports balkaninsight.

A group of students from Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at Pristina University sent a letter to local media on Friday calling for the demolition or repurposing of the church whose construction began during Slobodan Milosevic's rule in the 1990s.

"As this building was built in the time of Milosevic's regime, right in the courtyard of the university campus, we express our deep indignation about why nothing has yet been done by the Republic of Kosovo to destroy that building, or turning it into a type of building that will serve the students of the University of Pristina 'Hasan Pristina' for their studies, such as a library," said the letter.

The students also said that renewed construction work on the unfinished church, preparations for which started on Thursday, should stop permanently.

"We believe that this construction only started to raise inter-ethnic tensions, therefore we have not taken any action yet, but if it continues in the coming days, we will react as Kosovo's Albanians students always have done, with various [protest] actions and student protests," the letter warned.

The students said that they are not against any religion or religious building, but against what they called the "degradation" of the university.

Serbian Orthodox Church representatives in Kosovo started cleaning the church on Thursday, but their work was stopped by the Pristina municipality's inspection office, which claimed they did not have the proper permit for it.

The cleaning was organised by local Serbs and the church after unknown perpetrators put tyres in the building and set fire to them on September 9.

The fire didn't do any significant damage to the building, but the Serbian Orthodox Church and local Serbs called the attack shameful and urged the Kosovo authorities to find the perpetrators.

Sources

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/pristina-students-against-the-orthodox-church-in-university-campus-09-16-2016>

Kosovo Ministry of Culture bans reconstruction works at Holy Archangels Monastery near Prizren (KOSOVO)

October 12, 2016 - Diocese of Raška and Prizren, Serbian Orthodox Church published communique on Kosovo Ministry of Culture ban.

“Kosovo Ministry of Culture with its Institute for Protection of Cultural Monuments and the local Prizren Department of Urbanism has blocked continuation of the reconstruction works on St. Nicholas church at the Holy Archangels Monastery near Prizren these days. The Inspectors appeared at the monastery requesting an immediate termination of all works. The workers who take part in the construction of this ancient church as the only place of worship at the Holy Archangels Monastery were threatened with police and fines if they continue their work. Kosovo daily KOHA published an article today saying that the Ministry of Kosovo claims that the works at the Monastery are “illegal because no construction permit has been issued”.

Our Diocese agreed the beginning of the works on reconstruction at Holy Archangeli Monastery already in May this year at the Implementation and Monitoring Council with participation of the heads of EU and OSCE Missions in Kosovo and two Kosovo Ministers, of Culture and Spatial Planing. Mr. Kujtim Shala, the Minister of Culture (who is also a deputy PM and member of the LDK party) personally gave assurances that the permit would be issued in ten days, so the next IMC meeting was agreed for the beginning of June in Prizren. However, since then no permit has been issued and the Ministry after months of delay ultimately

made a decision to stop the reconstruction works (which in the meantime had begun due to the expenditure timeline of the grant). Kosovo and International representatives were informed on the works in August and no cessation of works was suggested by Kosovo representatives.

“Such a behavior of the Kosovo Ministry of Culture is a sad example of direct violation of a fair agreement made in the presence of the highest international representatives in Kosovo. The Ministry demonstrates a deplorable lack of both professional and moral credentials for the continuation of the heritage reconstruction and shows that there is no good will to work with the Serbian Orthodox Church along the internationally granted principles”, said Bishop Teodosije. “The construction ban at the Holy Archangels Monastery is an act of misuse of institutional powers directed against our freedom of worship and normal life of our Church”, emphasized the Bishop.

Due to such an attitude of the Ministry of Culture, the work of the mixed Council on religious heritage (IMC) has been suspended for five months which does not only inflict damage to our Church but also to the Kosovo Government which seems not to be ready (or able) to guarantee the compliance with the principles accepted in the Ahtisaari Plan. These principles were confirmed by highest Kosovo political figures in their public letter in November 2015, which provided full discretion of management and reconstruction of its property was granted to the Serbian Orthodox Church in lines with the Annex V of the Ahtisaari. The readiness of the Church to work together with Kosovo institutions on the reconstruction of the heritage in the spirit of cooperation and with international mediation has clearly been

misused. We can, therefore, only conclude that after the campaign of systematic destruction of Serbian Orthodox churches in Kosovo we are facing now a new strategy of institutional pressures and denial of our freedoms and rights on all levels. An example of this strategy we can see in the relationship of the Priština Municipality towards the church of Christ the Savior.

Holy Archangels Monastery near Prizren was built in the 14th century. In 2004 massive Kosovo Albanian riots the previously reconstructed part of the monastery was looted and burned to the ground and monks forced to flee. Some premises have already been reconstructed since 2005 but the process is continuing and will take years.”

Sources

<http://www.eparhija-prizren.com/en/statements/diocesan-communique-kosovo-ministry-culture-bans-reconstruction-works-holy-archangels-mon>

A religious community is being sent out of a village in Rovenskaya Region by the proponents of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)

October 20, 2016 - In the village of Sudobichi, Rovenskaya Region (Ukraine), where “Kyiv Patriarchate” appropriated the church, local worshipers continue holding sacred services in one of the local farmhouses, according to the Information and Educational Departament of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

The appropriation of the church, named after Kosma and Damian, the Holy Unmercenaries, took place on 11 September, 2014.

However, there have been attempts to deprive

the worshipers from the premises as well.

“Our neighbors – the so-called “Christians” of the “Kyiv Patriarchate” are trying to kick us out of the house. Every week they write a claim letter to the police, stating that our priest spreads propagandistic literature“, – said Maria Zhak, a churchwoman and a great-granddaughter of the owner of the house.

According to Priest Alexander Kardash, the Father Superior of the parish, these slanderous accusations are spread among the villagers by a small group of proponents of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Kyiv Patriarchate, with the aim to kick him and his family out of Sudobichi. “No matter how hard they agitate for the Kyiv Patriarchate”, only 5 people go to this church after the appropriation. The other churchgoers, who used to attend worships on a regular basis, have to say prayers in the house“, – said the priest.

Local government authorities support the active proponents of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, who openly propagandize hatred towards the church in Sudobichi.

At the meeting of the villagers, which took place this summer, it was decided to take away the plot of land from the priest, who owns it on legal grounds.

Sources

<http://news.church.ua/2016/10/20/na-rovenshhine-obshhynu-veruyushhix-upc-vygonyayut-iz-sela/?lang=ru>

Mayor's Office is trying to take away one of the two Orthodox churches in town (UKRAINE)

November 4, 2016 - The Mayor of Ivano-Frankivsk said that Lviv Economic Court of

Appeal settled the claim on cancellation of a lease with the Ivano-Frankivsk diocese of the UOC.

In the city with a population of over 250 thousand people there are only two temples belonging to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, one of them the City Council of Ivano-Frankivsk decided to take. The Mayor's Office is trying to adjudge of the building at Chornovol street 6 and 6B belonging to the diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In that case the Orthodox citizens of Ivano-Frankivsk will be deprived not only a place for worship, as well as of the office of the diocesan administration, as reported by the Information and Education Department of the UOC.

On November 3rd the Mayor of Ivano-Frankivsk Ruslan Martsinkiv informed the public that the Lviv Economic Court of Appeal sustained the appeal of the Executive Committee of the Ivano-Frankivsk City Council on cancellation of a lease of non-residential premises with Ivano-Frankivsk diocese of the UOC.

The diocese confirmed that legal proceedings with regards to the premises at Chornovol street 6 and 6B have been going on for more than a year.

"Ivano-Frankivsk diocese had won one case before, which was reviewed in the economic court of the city. With regard to the decision of the court of Lviv, we haven't received any documents", – commented on the statement of the mayor Archpriest Vasily Romanyuk, the representative of the diocese.

According to Archpriest Basil, even in the 90s to the believers of Ivano-Frankivsk were treated better.

"Having deprived in the 90-ies the UOC believers of all the churches, we were given the opportunity to pray in this kindergarten. Today there are four priests in the church, ten men of the clergy in diocesan administration. A large religious community in the name of the Transfiguration of Our Lord has been praying in this room for 25 years – since 1991," – said the priest.

Ruslan Martsinkiv argues that his desire is to return the buildings to the city and doesn't hide the discontent by the fact that "they (the UOC) already have a new church on Dovzhenko street."

It is worth mentioning that in a city with a population of over 250 thousand people there are only two temples in which Orthodox believers have the opportunity to pray. Over 25 years of independence, the city authorities of Ivano-Frankivsk, in violation of the law made it possible to build only one small temple in the city, despite the fact that other religions in that time have built dozens of places of worship. The diocesan management of the UOC had to rebuild the abandoned kindergarten as temple, since no land property in the city was provided.

In addition, the diocese suggests that the authorities might just be interested in land in the downtown. "It is possible that the desire to take possession of "a tasty morsel" in the center can be an occasion to expose residents to the street of their city who have been praying here for 25 years. And what will happen to the temple altar, cross and dome on the building", – says Father Basil.

The diocese spokesman assured that the orthodox citizens of Ivano-Frankivsk will defend their legitimate rights. If the information on the cancellation of the contract is confirmed, the diocese will file

a complaint to the Supreme Economic Court of Kiev, and will also sent a letter to international human rights organizations.

Sources

<http://news.church.ua/2016/11/04/v-ivano-frankovske-meriya-pytaetsya-otobrat-u-pravoslavnyx-odin-iz-dvux-xramov/?lang=ru>

A. Reaction of the Local Orthodox Churches and the State authorities to the violation of the freedom of assembly of the Orthodox Christians.

Serbian Patriarch urges Poroshenko to stop the seizure of Orthodox shrines (UKRAINE)

February 25, 2016 - Patriarch Irinej of Serbia on behalf of the Synod sent a letter to Ukrainian President Pyotr Poroshenko, expressing deep concern with oppressions of canonical Orthodoxy in Ukraine and threat of seizing shrines of all-Orthodox importance, as reports Interfax.

“Our Christian conscience is deeply concerned with the destruction of centuries-old unity of Orthodox Church in Ukraine and with support of this destruction that threatens the unity of the entire Ecumenical Orthodoxy, which is preparing the great Pan-Orthodox Council this year,” Patriarch Irinej writes in his letter quoted by the UOC Departament for External Church Relationships’ website.

Speaking about the attempts of UOC KP to seize the Kiev Lavra of the Caves, the Pochayev Lavra and numerous Orthodox churches, the patriarch notes that “churches and shrines of one nation exist to reconcile people, to multiply love to God and neighbors, to preserve fraternal accord, not to divide or sow discord.”

As was reported, the Ukrainian Culture Ministry recently transferred a church at the territory of St. Sophia cathedral complex to the self-proclaimed ‘Kiev Patriarchate.’

Late in December Patriarch Irinej of Serbia sent a letter to Patriarch Kirill and Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev to condemn

actions of radicals against the believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

“Evil can dress itself up in the clothes of faith, light and truth but its fruits – falsehood, division and hate of the neighbour – will invariably expose it. Followers from the so-called ‘Patriarchate of Kiev’ have long been renounced by Orthodox Churches and refer to Orthodoxy only by name. And their disdain for the norms of Christian morality and readiness to hate, to lie and to spill blood is living proof of it,” the head of the Serbian Church then said in his letter.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12790>

Metropolitan Theophanes criticized authorities for having refused to transfer Saint Isaac Cathedral to the ownership of the Church (RUSSIA)

February 19, 2016 - The refusal of the authorities to deliver Saint Isaac Cathedral (Saint-Petersburg, Russia) to the Russian Orthodox Church was subject to criticism by Metropolitan of Kazan and Tatarstan Theophanes, Interfax reports.

“The opponents of the delivery of this site to the Church seem to have forgotten that this highly valuable building was constructed with the contributions and financial donations of believers and not of the museum staff. In 1930s parallel to the massacre of believers by the revolutionary government it was confiscated and converted into an

antireligious museum. What else is this if not a robbery?” – sad the metropolitan at UNESCO Forum on management of world heritage religious sites.

In his discourse he calls for taking into consideration the experts’ arguments on the cathedral’s state of preservation but also for keeping in mind the historical justice which consists in “returning to the Church its seized property regardless any artificial conditions. The believers have the truth on their side in this argument as they can not be uninvited guests there where they used to be hosts throughout the centuries” metropolitan Theophanes emphasized.

He expressed his gratitude to the Russian museum association for preservation of the cathedral telling that the conversion of it into a museum was “much better than its destruction by the godless government or conversion of it into a prison or stable.”

However, according to him “no considerations of cultural value may constitute a barrier for resuming the religious life in the church and the monastery,” as “the material may not prevail over the spiritual and the freedom of religion may not become a hostage of some technical norms regulating the preservation status of the site”.

The metropolitan called for finding the balance between “the evident need for physical protection of religious sites” and the reservation for the believers of the possibility to exercise their religious freedom, which is “inconceivable without the free use of churches and monasteries for their intended purpose, i. e. for the fervent prayer to the Creator”.

In august 2015 it became known that the Church asked Smolny museum to transfer

to it the ownership of the Saint Isaac’s Cathedral. Earlier the state memorial museum transferred to the Church the homonymous Smolny and St. Sampson cathedrals. Interfax was informed that the Church has also made a similar demand for the church of the Savior on Blood (the fourth cathedral of the memorial museum). Later Smolny refused to transfer the cathedral of Saint Isaak.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=61999>

The Russian Orthodox Church is Concerned About the Political Pressure Exerted on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate (UKRAINE)

March 11, 2016 - The head of the Moscow patriarchate department for external church relations, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk commented on the communication issued by the press-service of the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko in relation to his meeting with the Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew. According to it, one of the questions discussed during this meeting was the foundation of a ‘United Local Orthodox Church’ in Ukraine, as the website ria reports.

The Chairman of the Moscow patriarchate department for external church relations, Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeev) of Volokolamsk told the press members that the Patriarchate of Moscow is deeply concerned about the situation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

This is how he commented on the communication of the press service of Petro Poroshenko regarding his meeting with

the Patriarch of Constantinople. Earlier the press service declared that the president and the Patriarch have discussed the future of Ukraine and the foundation of a 'United Local Orthodox Church' there. Patriarch Bartholomew himself, didn't mention that such an item was included to the agenda.

"We are very concerned about the situation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – the single canonical church on the territory of Ukraine as it was once again unanimously recognized during the recent meeting of the representatives of local churches" said the metropolitan.

He emphasized that the UOC of the Moscow Patriarchate 'undergoes political pressure'. Its churches are illegally seized, and the issues faced by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church prevail on the political agenda. There already exists a 'United Orthodox Church' in Ukraine – the Ukrainian Orthodox Church headed by His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry. There is no need to create it. Those who dissented from it just need to come back – this is the simple solution of this problem', stated the representative of the ROC.

Today Ukraine disposes of a canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church which is autonomous within the patriarchate of Moscow. There are also other church structures such as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate and the Ukrainian autocephalous church which are not recognized by the world orthodoxy.

Sources

<http://ria.ru/religion/20160311/1388274489.html#ixzz42gh8BjAa>

Ministry of Culture broke the law by delivering the Little Hagia Sofia to the UOC-KP (UKRAINE)

April 29, 2016 - The real cause lying behind the decision of the Ministry of Culture to deliver the Refectory Church in the National Sanctuary Complex 'Sophia of Kiev' to the UOC-KP through the violation of all legal norms have logical explanations. This fact is proven by a journalistic investigation published by GolosTV UA media group, as reports Union of Orthodox Journalists website.

'In order to offer this church for worship, it was indispensable to go through very complex approval procedures with various institutions including UNESCO. And this was done without coordination. So the Minister of Culture wanted and so he has done. And the question is – why the Kiev Patriarchate? There is a canonical Church in Ukraine – Ukrainian Orthodox Church recognized by the whole world and headed by His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphriy' – says the People's Deputy of Ukraine, member of the Parliamentary Committee on Culture and Spirituality, Vadim Novinsky.

According to experts, the decision to allow UOC-KP to hold worship in St. Sophia was biased because the head of the Regulatory Authority for related legislative issues, the former Minister of Culture, Vyacheslav Kirilenko is directly related to the Supreme Church Council of the UOC KP.

'Vyacheslav Kirilenko is a member of the supreme governing body of the Kiev Patriarchate, misusing his office. He offered a national treasure to his organization,' – as explains the political commentator Paul Karnazytsky.

Let's recall that in February this Refectory Church of the National Sanctuary Complex 'Sophia of Kiev', a unique world-class monument, listed among protected monuments of UNESCO, was open for the worship of the UOC-KP.

Sources

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpH-cF3OAGk&feature=youtu.be>

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/chastnoe-rassledovanie/zurnalistskoe-rassledovanie-maluyu-sofiyu-peredali-upts-kp-iz-za-lichnykh-interesov-kirilenk>

Press-release of the Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral (MONTENEGRO)

August 20, 2016 - On the occasion of prohibition and prevention of the clergy of the Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral to serve the liturgy on the day of feast of the Transfiguration in the church in Ivanova Korita by the Police of Montenegro, press service of the diocese delivered following press-release:

This year, as well, the Police of Montenegro firstly prohibited, and then disabled, clergy and believers to serve Divine Services on the feast of Transfiguration of Lord in the church dedicated to this holy feast in Ivanova Korita, under desecrated mountain of Lovćen. Strong police forces were deployed around the Church of Transfiguration from early Transfiguration dawn so that the clergy and believers, led by the Cetinje Episcopal protopresbyter-stavrophor Obren Jovanovic and the president of the Cetinje Church Municipality Rajko Radusinovic could not enter the holy temple to serve the holy liturgy.

Illegal act of the Police was demonstrated this year again, regardless of the fact that the

Administrative Court of Montenegro recently rendered a decision by which, because of the illegal acts, abolished last year's decision of the Ministry of Interior, by which it firstly rejected the Metropolitan's appeal on the decision of the Police – Cetinje Security Center about prohibition of Divine Services on the feast of Transfiguration in 2015 in the Church of the Holy Transfiguration in Ivanova Korita. Regardless of the decision of the Administrative Court, the Police again, this year, rendered identical illegal decision, by which it fiercely attacked not only the dignity of the Lord's Church, but also the right to freedom of religion, as one of the fundamental human rights. The Legal Team of the Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral, led by the coordinator of the Legal Council protopresbyter-stavrophor Velibor Džomić, PhD, appealed again the last illegal decision of the Police, which appeal was not decided within prescribed deadline.

As a reminder, it has been years now that the Police, by issuing these illegal decisions, persistently and illegally prohibit orthodox service on the day of feast of the Transfiguration in the temple which, pursuant to the legislation and public acts of the State of Montenegro, is a property of the Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral. The Metropolitan and its legal representatives have led almost a year-long legal battle, using the legal rights and possibilities, and have successfully proved before the court that the police, through its illegal acts, forbid to Church worship in one of the most important Christian feasts in the Ivanova Korita and the Orthodox temple which is owned by the Metropolitan since its foundation.

By its illegal conduct and decision, the Police of Montenegro actually tried to equalize centuries-old church in Montenegro

with the group of self-proclaimed people gathered, particularly for that occasion, around the so-called and anatemized priest Miraš Dedeić, in ideological and tribal organization the so-called Montenegrin Orthodox Church. Besides that, by its illegal decision the Police has also tried to put on the same level the Metropolitan, as the legal owner of the Church of Transfiguration in Ivanova Korita, with the group of people who publicly exposed their ambition to break into the church and desecrate it by taking into it anatemized people, so that they could performe services contrary to the orthodoxy and church cannons.

Bearing in mind the fact that we are in the days of the Assumption fast, and the fact that the decision of the Administrative Court of Montenegro was timely served to the Ministry of Interior and the Police of Montenegro, we request and expect that the Police finally starts to act in accordance with the legislation in force and stops to illegally equalize the Orthodox Church and anti-church, priests and former priests, owners and usurpers, orthodox believers and attackers of the holy places.

Passionate and ideological-tribal onslaught on the Holy place, as well as illegal acts of the Police, have caused great anger among the Orthodox believers. The Police has no right to proclaim the group of the self-proclaimed people as „church“ by its illegal decisions, and therefore harshly play around with the deepest feelings of the Orthodox believers. The Police is obliged to prevent and stop disruption of public order and peace, in accordance with legislation and legally, from the group of self proclaimed attackers of the holy place and Christian feast, instead of forbiding the Transfiguration service in the Orthodox temple in Ivanova Korita, this

year as well, and attacking the centuries long canonical order and the church property.

Sources

http://www.spc.rs/sr/saopshtenje_za_javnost_mitropolije_crnogorskoprimorske_26

Chapter 6: Acts of Vandalism and Desecration against Orthodox Worship and Sacred Places.

Four armed Islamists arrested in front of the main gate of Visoki Decani Serbian Orthodox Monastery (KOSOVO)

January 31, 2016 - The Diocese of Raška and Prizren of the Serbian Orthodox Church gave a communique about the incident out of Visoki Dečani Serbian Orthodox Monastery (Kosovo), as the official website of the Prizren diocese reports.

A group of four armed Islamists were arrested in front of Visoki Dečani Monastery. The arrested stopped in front of the monastery main gate in a white Golf vehicle with Uroševac (Ferizaj) registration plates (05). In a joint action of Kosovo police and Italian KFOR after the check of the documents and the vehicle it was found out that the arrested (four Kosovo Albanian males from different parts of Kosovo had weapons (a kalashnikov AK47 with 20 rounds of ammunition and a pistol with 16 rounds of ammunition). Inside the vehicle, also the Islamist literature was found. Two of the arrested were bearded with shaven head and trousers above ankles, which is characteristic for Wahabbists. The investigation is continued.

The Abbot of Visoki Dečani Monastery Fr. Sava Janjić confirmed that the monks and the personnel employed at the monastery feel safe and that this incident is one more indication that the presence of KFOR, which has been protecting the monastery for the last 16 years is of essential importance. The Monastery belongs to the World Cultural Heritage of UNESCO.

Visoki Dečani Monastery has suffered four armed attacks since the end of the war. Police have investigated only one attack and one Kosovo Albanian in 2007 was sentenced on 2.5 years for the attack on the monastery.

Sources

<http://www.eparhija-prizren.com/en/news/communique-four-armed-islamists-arrested-yesterday-evening-front-main-gate-visoki-decani-monast>

Police proved the accusation of the “Freedom” party of Zhytomyr towards the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to be a provocative act (UKRAINE)

January 25, 2016 - Act of vandalism was created by a resident of the city of Zhytomyr. It happened on the site of future temple construction, situated on Privokzalnaya place. As it was found out by the police officers, the man does not affiliate with any religion, as reported by the Union of Orthodox Journalists.

According to the 34 year-old resident of Zhytomyr region, he was dismantling the wooden cross as he considered it to be dangerous for people. Yet human right activists found out that the local authorities had permitted him to establish a stand to preach the Gospel near the future construction of the holy shrine. However, he doesn't affiliate himself with any religion. All these facts are subject to criminal investigation for hooliganism.

It is to be recalled that Victor Brokaryov, the “Freedom” party deputy of the local Duma,

blamed priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) for pulling down the cross. In addition, he referred to “His Grace Izyaslav”, a representative of the Kiev Patriarchate.

In his turn Nikodim, the ruling bishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (MP), the bishop of Zhytomyr, claimed that the Church had nothing to do with the act of vandalism and called the above accusation a provocative act. “Cross is a holy thing no matter who has set it up”, said the bishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate).

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/pol-ts-ya-p-dtverdila-shcho-zvinuvachennya-zhitomirsko-svobodi-u-b-k-upts-provokats-ya>

Vandalism of an Orthodox Church (KOSOVO)

January 11, 2016 - It is the second time that the Church of St.Demetrius in Susica (Kosovo) was vandalised. Members of the parish council informed their priest Protopresbyter Sava Šmigić, and reported the incident at police station in Gracanica, as the official website of the diocese reports.

The unknown perpetrators broke a window in the altar of the church and they found the moneybox. The priest said that they stole 50 euros. Archpriest Sava Šmigić said that small churches does not have money and the damages are considerable from such actions. He urged people who need money not to steal but to ask for it, and the church will try to give them. He underlined that financial needs does not justify such a behaviour.

Sources

<http://www.eparhija-prizren.com/sr/vesti/hram-svetog-dimitrija-u-susici-opet-na-meti-vandala-0>

Vandalism in an Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)

January 21, 2016 - The night of 20th January in Dnepropetrovsk (Ukraine), in the Church of Mother of God “Iverskaya”, unknown persons vandalized the miraculous icon of Mother of God as the website of the Union of the Orthodox Journalists reports.

According to the rector of the church archpriest Nikolai Nesprava, the vandals entered the temple and broke the stained glass. Then they stole the offerings of believers to the icon of Mother of God. Despite the fact that the shrine was protected by armoured glass, the sacrilege persons removed the protective components and stole the jewellery.

“These offerings represent not only material value, but a greater spiritual value. Behind every offering to this icon there is a personal experience of faith. People, who come to the church, are always interested in this. Believers from all around the world express their joy to Mother of God for different miracles”, commented archpriest Nikolai Nesprava.

Early in the morning, when the theft was discovered and the police was called. On the scene of the crime arrived law enforcement officers, who carefully conducted prompt action and even special police dogs participated to the investigation.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/v-dnepropetrovskom-khrame-vandaly-ograbili-chudotvornuyu-ikonu>

Desecration in an Orthodox Church (GREECE)

January 12, 2016 - Many significant religious and historical items were robbed

by unknown perpetrators, from the church of Saint Paraskevi, in the village Orino, in Epirus (Greece), as the website romfea reports.

The sacrilegious perpetrators took two very old books of the Gospel, the Holy Cenotaph, the Holy Grail, a Cross and a big Icon of Christ, which was placed in the Holy Gate. They also took two very old banners that were carried in religious processions.

A woman informed the police and police officers found the window of the church violated.

The priest of the church, who was called by the police, said that he found everything destroyed in the church. He said that many temples have alarm system but the perpetrators know well how to deactivate it and he asked from the State to protect them.

Sources

<http://www.romfea.gr/diafora/5837-stoxos-ierosulon-akomienas-naos-sto-pogoni>

Vandalism and desecration of an Orthodox church in the Diocese of Raska-Pizren (KOSOVO)

January 11, 2016 - Bishop of Raska-Prizren and Kosovo-Metohija Theodosius firmly condemned the vandalism and desecration of the church of Christ the Saviour in the centre of Prištinnj (Kosovo), which is still under construction, as the official website of the Serbian Patriarchate reports.

Albanian hooligans broke down the metal door and used the church for defecation as recorded on the video TV stations RTK2. This act of vandalism, extreme primitivism and lack of culture deserves special condemnation because the footage showing

members of the Kosovo police who calmly pass by the entrance to the temple. It was broken into and the protesters in yesterday's protest used the place as a public toilet.

The Diocese of Raska and Prizren invites the Municipality of Pristina, the Ministry of Physical Planning and culture in Kosovo as soon as possible to repair the metal doors which have been installed at the entrance to the temple and to cleanse after the desecration. Unfortunately, this behaviour is another case of attack and desecration of a church in the city centre.

Sources

http://www.spc.rs/sr/saopshtenje_zajavnost_eparhije_rashkoprizrenske

Arson of an Orthodox Church in Ukraine (UKRAINE)

January 5, 2016 - Unidentified people attempted to set on fire the church of St. Petro Mohyla of the Second Shevchenko Deanery of Kiev (Ukraine) as the information department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) reports. The residents of neighbouring apartment houses interfered immediately and the fire was put out before the arrival of the fire-fighters.

According to the church rector, archpriest Ioann Tronko, at about 2 AM the culprits set fire to the north wall of the church sanctuary from outside using incendiaries. Because of the arson, the church façade was damaged, but the fire was not spread inside the temple.

“The church was set on fire in a place that would not be noticed until later. Only by the mercy of God the blaze was not spread further in the church, because the people

called the fire service in time” the priest commented.

The Construction of this church was begun on the 12th of September 2007. In June 2008 His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev and All the Ukraine (Sabodan; 1935-2014) consecrated it in honour of the Holy Hierarch Petro Mohyla (Peter Mogila) and the Icon of the Mother of God “Softener of Evil Hearts”.

Sources

<http://news.church.ua/2016/01/05/v-kieve-neizvestnye-pytalis-szhech-cerkov-foto/?lang=ru>

Robbery in an Orthodox church (KOSOVO)

February 29, 2015 - Father Slobodan Djuric, priest of Prizren (Serbia), reported to the Kosovo police on 28th February that the church of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary dating from the 17th century, was broken into and ransacked, as the official website of the Raska Prizren diocese reports.

Unknown persons broke the door, took three gold crosses and they scattered the icons. It is also noticed traces of digging at the church, probably in an attempt to find a hidden treasure. The Church of Our Lady is on the list of cultural monuments of great importance.

Sources

<http://www.eparhija-prizren.com/sr/vesti/provaljena-i-opljackana-crkva-uspenja-presvete-bogorodice-u-sredskoj-zaseok-pejci>

Vandalism in an Orthodox Chaplain (GREECE)

February 24, 2016 - Unknown vandals broke the icon of Saint Gerasimos, which is located in the chaplain of Saint Gerasimos in a hospital of Athens (Greece), as the website ekklesiaonline reports.

This chaplain was built in 1905 and the icon of Saint Gerasimos was made with the art of vitro. The vandals didn't try to steal anything.

The spiritual and cultural importance of this chaplain is huge for Athens because Saint Porphyrios of Kafsokalyvia was priest there for 33 years. The icons of this chaplain are considered as a piece of art as they were created from the one of the most famous Greek painters Fotios Kontoglou.

Sources

<http://ekklesiaonline.gr/nea/item/11810-vevilosan-to-ekkklisaki-tou-agiou-gerasimou-pou-diakonise-gia-33-xronia-o-ag-porfyrios-foto>

Arson in an Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)

February 24, 2016 - On 22nd of February there was an arson in the temple of Mother of God in the city Mykolaiv, in Lviv region (Ukraine), as it is reported by the Department of Information and Education of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate).

The central part of the building was seriously damaged and a part of the refectory was burnt.

The church was saved because of the quick response of the fire brigade but the damage is estimated at 150 thousand UAH.

Policemen found 5 bottles containing

flammable liquid near the side doors of the temple and they opened the criminal proceedings.

Sources

<http://news.church.ua/2016/02/24/na-lvovshhine-byl-sovershen-podzhog-xrama/?lang=ru>

Arson of the car of an Orthodox priest (UKRAINE)

February 23, 2016 - An arson was committed on the car of orthodox Archpriest Paul Poleshchuk, (Head of social department of the Odessa diocese, Ukraine), who is responsible for the Center for Coordination of humanitarian assistance to displaced persons from the eastern regions of Ukraine and Odessa. The firemen extinguished the blaze, and then called the police, as the official website of Odessa Diocese reports.

The car was doused with gasoline in several places, and set on fire. The quick arrival of the firemen and their ability to act, prevented the explosion of the fuel tank, which could explode the building of the Coordination Centre.

On 23rd February, Archpriest Paul and the center staff were engaged all day in the issuance of food packages and financial assistance to more than 200 refugees and needy inhabitants of Odessa.

Odessa Diocese seeks to find out who stands behind this crime that made obstacles to the charity actions of the diocese and deprived simple people of the food.

Sources

<http://eparhiya.od.ua/sobyitiya/sobyitiya/3032-sovershen-umyishlennyiy-podjog-avtomobilya-rukovoditelya-sotsialnogo-otdela-odesskoy-eparhii-protiieraya-pavla-poleschuka>

Robbery in an Orthodox Church (CROATIA)

February 8, 2016 - It is the fourth time in the last two years that the temple of the Holy Prophet Elias in Đevrskama in Dalmatia Diocese (Serbia) is robbed, as the official website of the Serbian Patriarchate reports.

The same perpetrators burgled the temples of St. Joachim and Anne in Bribir and St. George in Dobropoljci. During these invasions they stole a small amount of money, that they found in the temple of the sales of candles and contributions of the faithful to the icons. They damaged seriously the door as they entered by force in the church.

Because of the frequency of those incidents, the Diocese of Dalmatia invites all the believers, to pay attention to their temples and not to allow anyone from any initiative to enter in their shrines.

Sources

http://spc.rs/sr/dalmacija_provaljen_hram_u_djevrskama

Ural 'voodoo master' goes on trial for public insult of religious feelings of believers' (RUSSIA)

February 19, 2016 - The case of 'voodoo master', who sacrificed a rooster in Yekaterinburg (Russia), was brought to court by the prosecutor's office. According to the information from prosecutor's office, the man known as the 'Voodoo master' publicly decapitated a rooster and sprinkled its blood upon Orthodox Christian funeral pall October 2014 having previously invited the representatives of mass media. The case was filed under 'public actions, expressing obvious

disrespect for society and committed in order to insult religious feelings of believers', ria novosti reports.

Prosecutors intend to ask the court to send him for treatment in a psychiatric hospital. The representative of Sverdlovsk region investigation department of the Investigative Committee, in turn, informed RIA novosti that there had been a number of examinations like cultural, religious and other carried out. The representatives of the media who were present at the ceremony were interviewed as well.

Sources

<http://m.ria.ru/incidents/20160219/1377345487.html>

Robbery in an Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)

February 15, 2016 - In the morning the Obukhov police department reported that in the village of Krenichi in Kiev (Ukraine) in the church of "Holy Virgin", unknown persons stole from the box for collecting donations, the amount of 1,000 hryvnas in cash, as the website kiev segodnya reports.

At the scene of crime arrived an investigative team. Law enforcement officers, inspected the place and found that the attackers entered in the temple by breaking the front door.

Criminal proceedings are opened for the case of theft according to the Article 185 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code.

Sources

<http://kiev.segodnya.ua/kaccidents/pod-kievom-nochyu-obokrali-cerkov-692164.html>

Robbery in an Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)

February 15, 2016 - Unknown perpetrators robbed the church of Saint Nikolas in the village Hilcha, Rivne region (Ukraine), as diocese of Rivne reports.

On the night of 13th February, police received a phone message from the villagers of Hilcha that unknown persons had intruded the church boutique on the source of St. Nicholas. The police investigation found that the thieves broke the windows and took icons, honey, crosses and many other church items.

In the morning of the same day, after inspecting nearby area, the villagers found many objects from the church shop that were broken and scattered around.

Head of the police department Alexander Panasyuk declared that two suspects were found are placed in temporary detention.

Sources

<http://rivne.church.ua/2016/02/15/na-dzhereli-svyatogo-mikolaya-u-seli-gilcha-zdolbunivskogo-rajonu-obikrali-cerkovnu-kramnichku/>

Robbery in an Orthodox temple (RUSSIA)

February 15, 2016 - The police of Kazan (Russia) are searching for a robber who got into Yaroslavl Miracle-Workers church, located in the territory of Arskoye cemetery, as the website Interfax-Religion reports.

"According to the preliminary data, donation boxes were broken and gold jewelry, hanging on the icons, was stolen" says the Press Service of the Administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the

Russian Federation for Kazan.

Rector of the church Archpriest Alexei Chumakov said that the value of missing objects was not in themselves, but rather its symbolism. "For us it is important not the gold and jewelry, but the evidence that people received assistance from the miraculous image", as reports Business Online.

A range of investigation procedures is being carried out. The procedures are to substantiate the fact of the robbery and arrest the suspect. The damages are being assessed.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=61952>

Vandalism to the building of an Orthodox diocese (GREECE)

February 2, 2016 - Unknown persons with covered faces entered to the building of the diocese of Salonika (Greece), as the website romfea reports. They threw red colour to the offices and to people who were working there. One man went to the hospital because they threw the colour in his face and his body.

Metropolitan of Salonika Anthimos was absent in the moment of attack but he said that this action is coming from anarchists who have already captured a building which belong to the diocese.

Sources

<http://www.romfea.gr/diafora/6292-o-mitropolitis-anthimos-gia-tin-epithesi-koukouloforon-stin-mitropoli>

Increase of church robbery in Ukraine (UKRAINE)

February 10, 2016 - According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, in the year, 150 robberies took place in Orthodox churches in Ukraine, as the website uoj reports.

Over the last two months the thieves hit almost every temple of the Odessa region.

Criminals prefer to take gold jewelry with images and the money from the donation box. Usually they don't touch valuable icons because it is difficult to sell them without being arrested. "In the last couple of months, thieves broke into the St. Iver Monastery, where they took the decorations from the Iberian Icon of Mother of God, the Holy Dormition Cathedral, a temple in honor of all Saints on Tairovskom cemetery church which is dedicated to the Holy Great Martyr Demetrios, in the Transfiguration park the temple in honor of the Mother of God.

The last case, as reported by the police of Odessa region, occurred in Illichivsk on 26th January 2016. The thieves emptied the box for donations of the parishioners.

In the diocese they still cannot estimate the amount of damage from those robberies. At this time in all the churches of Odessa they removed the decorations of the icons.

The deputy head of the club "Orthodox Generation" at St. Elias Monastery Tamerlan Bannura said that in the monastery such cases occur almost daily. "The worshipers stealing phones from pockets or handbags. So far, the police hasn't arrested anyone for the robberies in Odessa diocese.

The Orthodox churches are attacked by robbers in Sumy and Kiev dioceses of the

Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). It should be noted that the temples are not only robbed, but they are desecrated because they are worship places for God.

“In Kiev in the last two years, 14 cases of vandalism against churches was recorded. The robbery was observed in only a few of these cases. Most of this is an open blasphemy”, said the head of the Information and Education Department of the UOC Bishop Clement.

In the Kiev region, the most recent incidents concern the robbery in church of Saint Xenia of St. Petersburg and in the Assumption Cathedral in Darnitsa.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/v-ukraine-uchastilis-ogrableniya-tserkvey>

<http://orthodoxrights.org/robbery-in-an-orthodox-church-2.html>

<http://orthodoxrights.org/robbery-in-an-orthodox-church.html>

<http://orthodoxrights.org/robbery-in-an-orthodox-church-3.html>

Robberies in two Orthodox churches (GREECE)

February 10, 2016 - Unknown thieves perpetrated to two Orthodox churches in the island of Kos (Greece), as the website romfea reports.

The desecrators took advantage the fact that policemen of the island were absent in a special mission to deal with the Greek habitants who were against the building of hot spot center for the refugees.

They broke the door of the church of Saint Paul, then they broke the box of money for

the poor and they took all the amount which still cannot be estimated. They continued by violating the door in the church of Saint Eleftherios where they broke the box of money for the parish and they took all the amount they found.

Policemen believe that they will find them soon as they made the mistake to extinguish a cigarette in the place where the believers put the candles. This remain of cigarette has their DNA and it will make the investigation easier.

Sources

<http://www.romfea.gr/diafora/6411-stoxos-agnoston-ierosulon-duo-naoi-stin-ko>

Act of vandalism at a hospital Orthodox church (UKRAINE)

February 6, 2016 - On the night of 5th to 6th February in the town of Nemirov in Vinnitsa region (Ukraine), on the territory of the hospital the orthodox church dedicated to St Luka of Crimea was vandalized, as press service of the UOC MP reports. The temple is under the jurisdiction of Tulchin diocese.

Unknown vandals wrote an offensive inscription on the refectory wall of the building, accusing the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) as supporter of separatism.

This political act of vandalism is seen as inter-faith hatred. The rector archpriest Basil Goncharuk and faithful have asked from the local authorities to protect them in accordance with applicable law.

In the diocese is mentioned that it is not an isolated case of application of insults and threats of UOC communities.

On the 18th January in Epiphany Eve, in the village of Gubnik Gaysinsky district, archpriest Basil Bogdan and parishioners who came to the vigils, found on the gate of the temple someone else's lock without a key and a note attached to it, in which the priest was threatened with physical violence. The Rector informed the local police and the Security Service of Ukraine about the incident. The results of the investigation are not yet known.

Sources

<http://news.church.ua/2016/02/09/v-tulchinskoj-eparxii-sovershen-akt-vandalizma-nad-bolnichnym-xramom-upc/?lang=ru>

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/v-nemirove-neizvestnye-sovershili-akt-vandalizma-na-territorii-khrama-upts>

Arson to an Orthodox Church (GREECE)

March 23, 2016 - An arson happened to the church of All Saints in Kallithea, Athens region (Greece), as the website romfea reports.

According to the testimonies of the witnesses the arson happened from Arabs refugees. The fire brigade arrived very quickly and the fire was under control. The kitchen of the church was destroyed. The rector and the other priests who serve in this church were there from the first moment of the incident.

The vicar of the Archbishop of Athens, Archimandrite Simeon Voliotis condemned the incident and communicated with the authorities in order to be informed. "We demand the protection of our churches and the attribution of the responsibility for what happened", said a representative of the Archdiocese of Athens who spoke in romfea.

The rector of the church of All Saints, father Timotheos Maheriotis expressed his gratitude to the Police, the Fire brigade and all the laymen who contributed to extinguish the fire.

Sources

<http://www.romfea.gr/epikairota-xronika/7139-empristiki-epithesi-ston-in-agion-panton-kallitheas-foto>

Attempt to Desecrate the Cross on the Construction Site of an Orthodox Church (RUSSIA)

March 3, 2016 - Law enforcement officers of Losinoostrovsky North-Eastern Administrative District of Moscow (Russia) prevented an attempt to desecrate the orthodox cross located on the construction site on Ostashkovskiy Alley, as orthodox radiostation Radonez and the press service of the 'Sorok Sorokov' orthodox movement reports.

Police officers ordered to dismantle the tent camp in the Torfyanka Park that was set up without land tenure agreement. Unidentified persons from the tents attempted to hamper the police officers' legal act and to block the traffic on Ostashkovskiy Alley. Later, after the work on dismantling was completed, they tried to break into the construction site of the orthodox church by breaking the fence in three places but were timely caught by guards and prevented from committing unlawful acts.

Operative investigative measures are being conducted to identify the organizers and perpetrators of the night break-in. According to Decree 280 of the Moscow City Government and the decision of the Babushkinskiy district court, an orthodox church in honour of the Kazan icon of the Mother of God shall be built to

Losinoostrovsky District. Since 2012 the area residents have been filing requests to the executive authorities asking for construction of a church in their district.

‘Sorok Sorokov’ movement published a video report prepared by ordinary people where they declare that opponents of the church want to repeat the Ukrainian cross demolition ‘campaign’ in Russia. According to them, this attempt to pull down the cross is not the first one. In June when the construction was just starting, they did also undertake some actions to demolish it but encountered resistance from the part of orthodox believers.

They accused certain Duma deputies of having poisoned people’s minds against the church falsely alleging that the whole park territory would be devoted to the construction of a monastery whereas the church occupies merely 1% of the park area.

After the previous protest actions, where the opponents declared that their main objective is to overthrow the actual authorities, the prefect Vinogradov stated that no violation has been found out; the general of MIA, Skuba in turn took away the surveillance camera located in the construction site. Consequently, malefactors cannot be identified.

Sources

<http://radonezh.ru/news/predotvraschena-popytka-oskverneniya-kresta-na-meste-stroitelstva-pravoslavnogo-khrama-154999.html>

http://vk.com/sorok_sorokov?w=wall-53664310_70893

Two churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were robbed (UKRAINE)

March 10, 2016 - The Church of the Great Martyr Demetrius of Thessaloniki in village Sloboda-Dashkovetskaya (Ukraine) was robbed on March 1 and the Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Theotokos in Medvezhye Ushko Village – on March 8, as the press service of the Vinnytsya Diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church reports.

Traces of the break in were found by the rector of the church. According to him the criminals broke the window glasses and stole old silver vessels used for the Divine Liturgy.

The robbery of the church in village Medvezhye Ushko was detected by parishioners. Particularly the unknown people broke the lock on the door of the church and stole the icon of the Holy Great Martyr Demetrius with a particle of his relics.

The police were called to the crime scenes and necessary investigations were carried out.

Sources

<http://orthodox.vinnica.ua/novini/novini-eparhii/1537.html>

Attempt to set fire to an Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)

April 25, 2016 - Unknown individuals have made an attempt to set fire to a wooden Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in Kiev’s Pushkin Park, as the website Interfax-Religion reports.

Archpriest Valentin Makarov, the senior priest of the church, said the incident occurred in the early hours of Sunday. At first the flames were strong, but quickly died

down. The fire damaged the outer wall of the building and an icon located there, the press service for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church reported on Monday.

“An anti-flammable substance was put on the church last fall because we had expected it to happen: the situation in Kiev is such that every wooden church is in danger, it is vulnerable and our ‘well-wishers’ will get to it sooner or later,” the priest said.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12906>

‘Cultural’ terror: how officials in Volyn region are involved in the persecution of the UOC community (UKRAINE)

April 13, 2016 - The seizure of the Holy Intercession Cathedral in the Gribovitsa village of Volyn put the Department of Cultural of the local District Administration in a difficult situation. On the one hand, they had to turn a blind eye to the intrusion of representatives of the Kyiv Patriarchate in the church, which the latter have been using without any legal grounds since December 2015. On the other hand—the existence of protection agreement with the Holy Intercession community of the UOC in this situation does not allow officials to openly ignore the fact of seizure, as reports Union of Orthodox Journalists.

Instead of contributing within its power to the return of the church to its legitimate user, the Department of Culture of the District Administration have been literally ‘bombing’ of the UOC priests in Gribovitsa with instructions concerning the church premises as well as other upsetting new documents for several months. Officers of Culture

accused the priest ousted from the church of inaction, saying that he has not corrected the flaws in detected the church. The district administration officials are well aware of what is going on in the village.

In a document dated 1 December 2015, sent just a few days before the last church seizure by the Kyiv Patriarchate, the Department of Culture makes reference to the decision of the Commission which came to a strange conclusion. It turns out that replacement of the entrance doors during the repair work is a flagrant violation, which irreparably damaged the authenticity of the architectural monument.

A next instruction with similar content has been prepared on January 5, 2016, as it becomes clear from the references in it. This means that it happened almost simultaneously with the ‘victorious’ visit of the head of the Diocese of the UOC-KP to Gribovitsa. The head of the Department of Culture, Elena Shumik who signed these documents come to her position relatively recently but enough time has passed to get acquainted with the archived documents on the Holy Intercession Cathedral, or to understand that her department is simply used for attacking the UOC community in Gribovitsa.

The priest recalled that he is not allowed to enter the church, so he refuses to break the protection agreement as long as the investigation on seizure is ongoing. In fact there is no legal ground for this. However, making reference to his failure to comply with regulations, the Department of Culture insists on breaking the contract and for some reason particularly with the Orthodox community, not with Gribovitska Village Council, which is also one of the members of the church.

An interesting fact is that District Department of Culture has never shown such interest in the status of the monument during the 17 years of service of Igor Margita in the Holy Intercession Cathedral. The flaw of documentation from the officials to the priest for the past few months evidently exceeded the correspondence activity over all the years.

On the one hand, it is a good fact that officials started to care about at least one of the cultural monuments they are responsible for. On the other hand – it is at least unclear why the ‘cultural’ attack on the UOC community in strange way coincided several times with illegal actions of the Gribovitska community of the Kyiv Patriarchate. I would not want to admit the idea of a collaboration between the officials and raiders.

Perhaps Culture representatives of the District Administration of Ivanychivskiy Village could share experiences on the protection of monuments with their colleagues from Gorokhovskiy and Lutsk villages. It is impossible that a complete reconstruction of the church in Uhryniv Village by Kyiv Patriarchate without any authorization from regulatory authorities not interest in the local Department of Culture. Apparently, chipped walls and excavated area near the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Lutsk is a less significant infringement than the replacement of windows and doors in the Church of Gribovitska with the approval of regulatory structures.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/publikatsii/zashchita-tserkvi/kulturnyy-terror-kak-chinovniki-na-volyni-uchastvuyut-v-travle-obshchiny-upts>

Robbery in an Orthodox Church (UKRAINE)

April 14, 2016 - Some people broke into the local church named after St. Dmitry in the village of Illyashivka, Ostrozhsky district as Rivne Diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church reports. The criminals had broken down the side-door, prowled about the church and got out through the sacrarium.

According to the rector of the Church, archpriest Nikolay Lashkevich, the perpetrators didn't seem to have intention to outrage over the church utensils. The unwelcome guests neither violated the altar nor took the holy sacraments, but they yielded to temptation of tasting the sacramental wine, which they drank at the altar and then left the empty bottle there.

The violators did not hesitate to take money from the donation box for cancer-stricken children and even took pennies, rested near the icons.

The police squad and crime scene investigation team arrived after the call of the priest who had noticed the signs of crime. Now the police are examining the scene. According to the police officers of the Ostrozhsky district, the investigation for the crime is going on: they are carrying out the procedure of identifying the suspects.

Sources

<http://rivne.church.ua/2016/04/12/na-ostrozhchini-oruduyut-cerkovni-kradiji/>

Orthodox church in Georgia desecrated (GEORGIA)

April 4, 2016 - Last week Nino Andriasova, a resident of Tbilisi announced through social media sites that some inscription inexplicably

appeared on the wall of Jvari monastery in Mtskheta. 'Today I went to Jvary with some guests and what do you think I saw there... The walls were covered with inscriptions in Turkish, Arabic and Latin languages. Why is this vandalism ignored in our country?' she asked, as reports website blagovest.

Nino Andriasova has also shared images as a proof of this fact. The public reacted with indignation, and the police started an investigation in accordance with article 259, clause 2, paragraph 1 stipulating that all damage or destruction of cultural heritage must be punished. According to the data of the National Agency for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, there are proper names on the northern wall of Jvari Monastery written presumably in Arabic. However, the situation might not be that simple, the weekly news agency kvirispalitra.ge reports. In an exclusive interview with the correspondent of the newspaper, the director of the Institute of Oriental Studies 'G. Tsereteli', Giorgi Sanikidze explained the sense of the said inscriptions as follows: 'In my opinion it is a manifestation of extremism.'

Bardi Natchkebia, the head of the Centre for Antiterrorism says: 'I think he who wrote this is absorbed by religious extremism, disregard for tolerance, and cynicism! This is the most common example of manifestation of the religious extremism.'

Unfortunately, the propaganda of religious extremism is disseminated on a large scale and in different forms in Georgia. These inscriptions on the walls of Jvary monastery imply that someone wants to belittle our religion.

In fact, the success of the fight against religious extremism depends on the level

of religious education. So, Muslim activists in Georgia must set the classical tolerance laid down in traditional Islam against their radical ideas'.

Beglar Kamashidze, a Georgian mufti contacted the weekly Georgian news agency 'Kviris Palitra'

It is an evident case of vandalism. No religion has the right to offend another faith. The word 'Islam' in Arabic means 'peace', which is incompatible with violence. We consider that those who accept the Islam become faithful, others live according to their own faith. We do not impose our religion and do not inculcate anyone with it. It's better if people love each other and are conscious of the significance of Islam, if we really want to exalt Allah.

The abbot of St. Nicolas Church in Narikala, the archpriest Gheorgi Tevdorashvili considers that if this was an action intended against Georgian Church, it will be followed by a series of similar acts.

'However if this is not so, it appears that the inscriptions were made by an amateur tourist-blasphemer. We have to forgive him and intensify our prayers. Our monuments need protection. I prefer to consider that this is an act of an unconscious tourist, although I don't exclude that it might be a provocation, but do not want to add fuel to the fire. It may create tension between representatives of various faiths, which is possibly the very aim of perpetrators. Certainly the expression "Praise Allah" itself is not offensive for Christian religion as some use it to glorify the God, but their presence on the walls of a church is unpleasant. I wonder if the inscriptions in Turkish and Arabic were made by the same person or different. It matters.'

The head of the press-centre of Georgian Patriarchate, David Sharashenidze said:

No matter if the inscriptions contain the words “Allah akbar” or just a name, we regard it as an unacceptable act of vandalism against the orthodox church. It is very difficult to establish who are the organizers and what is their aim. I don’t know whether it is a provocation or sacrilege, the investigation will prove it.’

‘Maybe these inscriptions are not that dangerous as we think. But it is certainly an act of vandalism. Never before we have seen anyone to write ‘Allah akbar’ on the walls of orthodox churches in Georgia. It seems to be the main message here.

The word ‘Aziz’ on preceded by ‘X’ with a full stop is also clearly seen. Aziz in Turkish means ‘virtuous, kind-hearted, merciful’. No one would write adjectives. Most probably it is a last name. Another image very evidently shows the name ‘Mehmet Hasan’. This statement of Gheorgi Sanikidze concludes the article in the weekly magazine ‘Kviris Palitra’.

Sources

<http://www.kvirispalitra.ge/public/29053-qjvris-monasterze-qalah-aqbarq-tsaatseresq.html>

<http://blagovest-info.ru/index.php?ss=2&s=7&id=67325>

Protest in front of Reževica in Paštrovići (MONTENEGRO)

April 15, 2016 - ‘The latest attack on Paštrovska monastery in Reževići, by already tried and tested means, Directorate for Protection of Cultural Goods, once again showing hatred towards everything that is Serbian. “Paštrovići residents are ready to stand in defence of their sacred sites. A recent

‘invasion’ of inspectors of the Directorate for the Protection of Cultural Goods to Reževići monastery complex was an affront to their spiritual and moral being, as reports the diocese of Montenegro and Littoral of Serbian Orthodox Church.

Villagers lodged a protest in the courtyard of Reževići monastery as the inspector of the Administration for Inspection Affairs stopped the work which, as reported to the Administration for the Protection of Cultural Goods, have been performed illegally in the monastery, a cultural heritage under state protection.

‘This is an attack on Reževići monastery in Paštrovska, by already tried and tested means, Administration for the Protection of Cultural Goods, once again showing hatred towards everything that is Serbian. Those living in Paštrovići are Serbs, and Reževići monastery belongs to the Serbian Orthodox Church. The fact that this does not comply with the policy of persecution of the Serbian people, Serbian church, Serbian history, Serbian language and culture of the Serbian people in Montenegro, does not mean that this policy can sow seeds of evil everywhere. Paštrovići people will not tolerate it. They did not even give up in front of the Diocletian and Venetian doges, Turks, French, Austrian and Italian occupiers, and will not give up now,’ said Ilija Vukovic.

He said to the Directorate for the Protection of Cultural Property that Paštroviće Church, built by their ancestors and renewed by them, does not represent mere ‘museum exhibits or dead ruins of the past.’

‘Churches are our daily living and vital need. There are people, monks and priests in the monastery, who perform rituals that are an integral part of our lives. Liturgy is served

there and people come and spend time in prayer. To allow this, there must be a setting for this, and not only a historical exhibit. Bones of our ancestors have been buried around the monastery and the church since time immemorial. As to the authorities and institutions, they must serve people and their needs, and not be tyrants, "said Vukovic.

He added that the abbot of Reževići monastery, Archimandrite Chrysostomos Nesic is loved by the people of Pastrovici and enjoys their full support for what he does in the monastery.

'He is an exemplary host of our monastery and takes care of every detail. He revived the monastery and it became livelier and cleaner than ever. There are also fresco painting and carving ateliers, 'said Vukovic

He wondered how to understand 'the unannounced incursions of inspectors in the house of God in a time of the great and honourable lent, when the brotherhood of the monastery is in strict fasting and constant prayer.

'Paštrovići people define this as an attack on their spiritual and moral being. We will not allow that to happen and will not stop defending our holy sites. All well-meaning people are welcome in our churches and monasteries, especially professional service of the State responsible for the preservation of cultural heritage, but also collaborators and cultured people who know that the church antiques are not just a bunch of rocks, but they are living a life that is being reborn spiritually and morally today as it was in the past centuries, 'said Vukovic.

Resident Pero Radjenovic said that Reževići monastery is left by Nemanjići dynasty to

Paštrovići people for safekeeping.

'We are protecting and will continue to protect it. Today, as centuries back, this is a working monastery, full of faithful, tourists, Christians of the Orthodox world coming especially from our brotherly Russia. We pray especially for those who have an impact on some events that are now intended to calm passions, 'said Radjenovic.

Abbot Chrysostomos said that the monastery is made up of people who live in it.

'I invite all the people of Montenegro to keep our peace and brotherly love, to forgive each other to allow ourselves to await resurrection in joy and gladness and to build our future together. May God bless Montenegro, her power, all Orthodox Christians who live in it and the people of Paštrovički, and let us all forgive all transgressions. It is easy to condemn, but difficult to work with. And he who makes efforts makes mistakes, 'said Chrysostomos.

Sources

<http://www.mitropolija.com/protest-ispred-rezevica-pastrovici-porucuju-branicemo-manastir/>

In Gribovitsa (Volyn region) the house of the priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was damaged by vandals (UKRAINE)

On April 8, 2016 - Igor Margita, the prior of the St. – Pokrovsky church, found a dirty stain on the wall of his house which also covered a part of the window, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists. Later, on April 12 in his courtyard the remains of feathers were discovered on the doorstep and fish in the mailbox and on the road by the fence.

It wasn't the first act of vandalism, there had already been another one three weeks earlier on March 17. At that time the priest didn't address this issue to the media, however the day before the arrival to the village of the correspondent of the Union of the Orthodox Journalists the attackers decided to add elements of the occult to the throwing of dirt .

The active members of the Kyiv Patriarchate broke into St. – Pokrovsky church in September 2015. Starting from the date of the first public attack on the community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church until December 6 the temple remained sealed until the newly elected chairman of the village council Paul Stepanets with other supporters of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church- Kyiv Patriarchate broke the seals and illegally changed the locks.

Since winter the community of the Kyiv Patriarchate holds service in St. – Pokrovsky church and the community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church holds service at the vicarage.

The fact that the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church community remains in Gribovitsa is the last factor that prevents Kyiv Patriarchate from getting possession of the premises. The priest that has been living in the village for more than 15 years didn't privatize it.

The criminal case on the seizure of the St. – Pokrovsky church in Gribovitsa was dismissed for the second time by the regional law enforcement officers. The Court of Appeal of Volyn ordered to resume the investigation. Re-closure of the case was once again challenged in court by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church community.

On April 13 at 12.00 A.M. the first hearing will be held.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/v-gribovitse-na-volyni-ot-deystviy-vandalov-postradal-dom-svyashchennika-upts-foto>

Church of Moscow Patriarchate set on fire in Kiev (UKRAINE)

May 24, 2016 - The Church of Transfiguration of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate in Kiev has been vandalized, as reports Interfax.

The incident occurred on Sunday night. A group of unidentified individuals broke the doors to enter the church. Then they set the church on fire from the inside and outside and fled, the press service of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church reports.

Seeing the church ablaze, local residents alerted the police. The building survived, although the fire damaged its walls. An investigation has been launched.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12966>

Vandalism of property of the Georgian Orthodox Patriarchate (GEORGIA)

May 17, 2016 - Ten gay rights activists are being held in custody for defacing a fence at the Georgian Orthodox Patriarchate with graffiti, as reports the pravoslavie.ru.

The activists face possible charges of vandalism and disobeying police orders after being caught writing "All love is equal" on Church property in the early hours of Tuesday, May 17.

While the republic of Georgia engages the west politically and economically it remains

a staunchly conservative nation where the Church and Patriarch Ilia II are trusted by the vast majority of citizens.

Of course the Church maintains Christian understandings of the family and societal values, and Patriarch Ilia is scheduled to speak at this year's conference of the World Congress of Families, which understands the traditional, natural family as the fundamental building block of society, currently underway in Tbilisi. Earlier he stated that he "would pray to God that it may become a display of peace and love, of Christian values and culture."

The patriarch called last year's U.S. Supreme Court ruling on gay marriage a "big mistake," calling on all Georgians to discern between right and wrong. As an Orthodox Christian the patriarch of course does not support violence against any such activists and has in the past called upon the government to provide them with security.

Sources

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/93381.htm>

Unidentified criminal threw three grenades to an Orthodox church (UKRAINE)

May 4, 2016 - Three explosions were heard in the territory of All Saints Church in the village of Georgiyevka of the Marjino District in the Donetsk Region, unidentified criminals hit the building for the staff, with a novice inside, but he was not injured, as the website Interfax-Religion reports.

The Marjino Police Department of the Volnovakha District of the Police of the Donetsk Region reports that on the eve at 9:21 p.m. the police department received

information from the church novice who said that when he was inside, he heard one explosion, then several more explosions, then there was a sound of metallic subject, falling from the roof to the yard, and then there was one more explosion. The novice did not suffer any injuries.

The explosion damaged the roof. The investigative group and an expert worked at the site.

According to the preliminary version of the law-enforcement agencies, the criminals threw three grenades, supposedly RGD-5 to the premises. There were metallic fragments and a fragment of grenade found at the site, they are handed over to the expertise.

A criminal case according to Article 296, Part 4 (hooliganism) of the Criminal Code of Ukraine is initiated on the fact.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=12930>

Terrorist act averted at Orthodox Monastery (RUSSIA)

June 15, 2016 - A terrorist act was averted in the largest men's monastery of the Russian Orthodox Church with several centuries of history—the Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra, as reports pravoslavie.ru.

As learned from a source in the Federal Security Service [FSB], on June 14 in several cafes in the Pushkin region of Podmoskovye were found homemade explosive devices and schemes and photos of the Lavra.

"Makeshift explosive devices were found in three cafes" says the source. "One of them is located in the western part of the city of Pushkino. It belongs to an Azerbaijani

and some Dagestanis. According to our information, weapons were already found in this café a couple of years ago.”

Next to the homemade bomb was material confirming that terrorists had prepared a bomb for the Trinity-St. Sergius Lavra.

Investigative activity is currently underway, with no information on the detainees as of yet.

Sources

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/94335.htm>

Orthodox Church to be destroyed (UKRAINE)

June 14, 2016 - Cherkasy local authorities are going to demolish the Orthodox church of Candlemas, as reports the official website of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

June 6, 2016 Fr. Vladimir received a letter from the Department of Architecture of the Cherkasy. The letter demands believers “to release illegally occupied land,” and otherwise threatens to dismantle the building forcefully.

Cherkasy organization of veterans of Afghanistan in 2002 decided to build a temple here as a part of the memorial ensemble for Afghanistan veterans. Even the basement was installed in 2010 for the future temple, but construction wasn’t finished due to the lack of funding.

In the same time Fr. Vladimir agreed with the local authorities to build a temporary building for worship. The implication was that the graceful temple-trailer will be in effect until the consecration of the new church. This building was installed by local inhabitants and at their cost.

Unfortunately, it turned out that the city authorities suddenly decided not to build a church and stated that “there will be no domes and crosses in the memorial”. They have already allocated money for the new memorial complex without the church, and now they want to dismantle the existing one in spite of the fact that it obviously will not interfere with construction works. “Well, why is it there? It is not necessary, there is a church right there” – Vitaly Chernuha, the city’s chief architect said. But there are only temples belonging to the evangelists, Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Kievan patriarchate!

Deputy head of the veteran organization Vladimir Kovalenko says that “Afghans” are in favor of the existing temporary church to act in the future. Besides that, it is the only one church belonging to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in the area.

The church building is the property of the local Orthodox community. There is no legal basis to demolish it. The very heroes, who were meant to be praised by the memorial, like it. There are no local residents who oppose it. The decision of the city authorities violates religious freedom of Orthodox believers and seems to be a part of the State-run campaign against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate).

A petition to preserve the church is available on the website change.org

Sources

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<http://procherk.info/news/7-cherkassy/43652-afgansku-tserkvu-v-cherkasah-planuetsja-znesti>

<https://www.google.com.ua/maps/search/церкви+міста+черкаси/@49.443205,32.0621883,15zhttps://www.change.org/p/human-rights-stop-the-demolition-of-the-church-of-candlemas-building-in-cherkasy-ukraine>

Administration office of Gorlovka diocese of UOC shelled again (UKRAINE)

June 11, 2016 - The main office of Gorlovka eparchy of the UOC suffered from the shelling, as reports UOJ.

A guard of the diocesan office stayed alive – a fragment of a shell went across the security room just over his head. Nobody was injured, except the dog watching the premises.

The shell exploded near the transformer station. Pieces of it damaged walls of the station, a fence around it and a guard's car. The windows of the guard room were shattered with a blast wave.

It is to be recalled this is the first shelling of Gorlovka center since August 2015. Earlier Gorlovka diocesan administration office suffered from shelling twice – on July 28, 2014 and on August 25, 2015.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/vojna/administration-office-of-gorlovka-diocese-of-uoc-shelled-again>

<http://gorlovka-eparhia.com.ua/gorlovskoe-eparhialnoe-upravlenie-vnov-popalo-pod-artobstrel/>

Deputy destroyed Orthodox worship cross in Tatarstan (RUSSIA)

July 20, 2016 - A 57-year-old Pyotr Kuznetsov said that he didn't like the look of the Orthodox monument, as Life news reports.

The Investigation Department of the Investigation Committee in Tatarstan opened criminal proceedings against the deputy Pyotr Kuznetsov, who cut down the worship cross in the village Tashkirmen Laishvevo region. A 57 – year-old man is accused of vandalism.

It turned out that Kuznetsov is the director of the local enterprise “Laishevsky fish farm” and is a deputy of the local council of the municipal district. He didn't like the look of the Orthodox cross, so he decided to take it down.

The law enforcement agencies commented that during the interrogation Kuznetsov told the investigators that he didn't like the aesthetic appearance of the Orthodox cross. He also said that the cross was installed without his consent.

With regard to the deputy house arrest was elected as a preventive measure.

The six-meter high worship cross was set up on July 12 in honor of the feast of Saints Peter and Paul. The next day, the monument was taken down and left in the same place where it was installed.

Sources

https://life.ru/t/новости/880126/v_tatarstanie_zadierzhan_dieputat_spilivshii_shiestimetrovyi_kriest

The Serbian Orthodox Church Attacked in Sisak (CROATIA)

July 6, 2016 - After numerous cases of trespass into the property, insults, numerous kinds of verbal terror and threats to the the Sisak priest father Veselin Ristić and members of his family, in the night between July 4 and 5 2016 unknown perpetrators, with the use of force, broke

into the church of Saint Parascheva in Sisak (Croatia) and caused great damage to the property. By breaking windows vandals entered into the church, destroyed and scattered liturgical vessels and other ceremonial instruments. Afterwards they climbed up the balcony of the parish home, broke balcony door, devastated sleeping and dining room, whereas in the office of the Church Municipality they scattered archives and destroyed cash register. The fact that the perpetrators knew that the priest's family would not be in Sisak that night is a proof of the well prepared and realized intention to threat to the Serbian Orthodox Church openly, its clergy and believers both in Sisak and Croatia, as reports the Office of the Metropolis of Zagreb and Ljubljana on the website of Serbian Orthodox Church.

If the Sisak police authorities, who were reported every previous case of threat, insult and verbal violence, do not find perpetrators this time as well, we are wondering what is next? What kind of terror should the Serbian Orthodox Church, its churches and priests be exposed to in order to get legal protection? For that reason, the Metropolis of Zagreb and Ljubljana expects brotherly and Christian help of the Catholic Church in Sisak, although this and all similar cases will be reported to the Holy Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church and other relevant domestic and international personalities and institutions.

The church of Saint Parascheva in Sisak was built in 1895. Ustashas burned it in the Second World War, and during the 1991-1993 war the church and parish home were broken into, robbed and mined. The Church Municipality in Sisak has got two buildings. The parish home is situated in the F. Lovrića Street, whereas the second building

is made of the church and the office of the Church Municipality, which was rebuilt and consecrated on 12 April 2009, on the feast of Cveti (Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem).

Sources

http://spc.rs/sr/napadnut_srpski_hram_u_sisku

Orthodox Christian church in Ukraine's Gorlovka damaged in shellings (UKRAINE)

July 12, 2016 - The Orthodox Church of Holy Theotokos of Iveron under construction has come under shellings in Gorlovka (Ukraine), as reports TASS.

"Three shells were fired at the territory of the Church of Holy Theotokos of Iveron located in the center of the Nikotovka residential area that came under shellings. One of the shells fell near the central entrance to the church the construction of which has almost been completed. The facade of the church was damaged, 12 windows of the church were destroyed by two other shells. Tile that lay on the ground was also damaged, it was planned to be used for covering the roof. Another shell exploded behind the church," the Russian Orthodox Church said adding that the shelling took place in the small hours of July 10.

The Church of Holy Theotokos of Iveron in Gorlovka was shelled by Ukrainian forces six times since the start of military actions in Donbass.

Ceasefire is envisaged by the Minsk accords signed on 12 February 2015, after negotiations in the so-called "Normandy format" in the Belarusian capital Minsk, bringing together Russian President Vladimir

Putin, French President Francois Hollande, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Ukrainian President Pyotr Poroshenko. The package of measures also envisages weaponry withdrawal, prisoner exchange, local election in Donbass, constitutional reform in Ukraine and establishing working sub-groups on security, political, economy and humanitarian components of the Minsk accords.

Sources

<http://tass.ru/en/world/887704>

<http://gorlovka-eparhia.com.ua/stroyashhiysya-iverskiy-hram-gorlovki-postradal-ot-obstrela-1/>

Arson of an Orthodox church in Novo Sarajevo (BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA)

August 21, 2016 - In the night between 20 and 21 August 2016 an unknown person, or more of them, attempted to ignite an Orthodox church of Transfiguration of Lord in Novo Sarajevo, as reports Metropolis of Dabar-Bosna press service.

On his arrival to the Temple of Transfiguration for regular Sunday worship, the elder of the temple Archpriest Stavrophor Čedomir Đelmo immediately called the police and firefighters, who quickly extinguished the fire which already engulfed one room. Material damage is made and the investigation is still ongoing. The fact occurred two days after the patronal feast of this temple was held.

Sources

http://www.spc.rs/sr/pokushaj_paljenja_preobrazhenjskog_hrama_u_novom_sarajevu

In Baranovka Jesus Christ image was painted over for separatism and affiliation to the Russian world (UKRAINE)

August 23, 2016 A Mural with Jesus Christ image, which had been created on the wall of the former stationary traffic police checkpoint by artists Vladimir Kravchuk and Valentin Getman, was painted over white, as reports the Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

According to deputy of Baranovka district council Oleg Kovalsky, such decision was adopted on August 22 by the round table participants with participation of representatives of political forces, NGOs and activists. "We held the first meeting on August 18, but no particular decision was taken then. On August 22 participants of the round table adopted a unanimous decision to ask the artists to paint over the image on this Mural. They refused to do that. Then we decided to do it ourselves," said Oleg Kovalsky.

On 23 August the mural with Jesus Christ image on the wall of the former stationary traffic police checkpoint was painted over and it was decided that the community would define the destiny of the checkpoint building.

"We will eradicate any manifestations or even hints of separatism or "Russian world" irrespective of ranks or party affiliation. Tomorrow we will put here national flags on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Independence," said Oleg Kovalsky.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/in-baranovka-jesus-christ-image-was-painted-over-for-separatism-and-affiliation-to-the-russian-world>

St. Michael's Church of UOC in Avdeevka suffered from shelling (UKRAINE)

August 18, 2016 - The town of Avdeevka was exposed to mortar fire, resulting in a mortar shell damaging the part of the St. Michael's Church, reports UOJ.

According to law enforcers, the enemy fire hit a residential area in the city, including St. Michael's Church located in Krasnaya Street. Luckily, there were no casualties. The mine shrapnel damaged the church bells.

An investigative operational group of the Avdeevka police department is working on the site.

Records on this fact are made in the Unified Register of pre-trial investigations under article 258 "Act of terrorism" of the Criminal Code of Ukraine.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/st-michael-s-church-of-uoc-in-avdeevka-suffered-from-shelling>

<http://ukranews.com/news/444801-obstrelly-boevykov-razrushyly-svyato-mykhaylovskyy-khram-v-avdeevke>

Orthodox church robbed in West Ukraine (UKRAINE)

August 16, 2016 - An Orthodox church in the west of Ukraine has gotten robbed again, reports russkiymir. This is the fifth incident of such kind that has happened in the country over the past months.

This time the lawbreakers broke into St. Michael's Church in Danchimost, Rivne Oblast. According to the press service of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the crime was committed on the night of August 14. The robbers broke down a window. Once they got

inside the church they desecrated the church and stole the collections.

Already 4 churches were robbed from April to June this year. The Police could not find the robbers in any of the cases.

It is to be recalled that in May this year two Ukrainian Orthodox Churches of the Moscow Patriarchy were broken into and robbed in the Rivne Oblast. Both incidents were registered within Sarny Raion.

Sources

<http://russkiymir.ru/en/news/211670/>

<http://www.russkiymir.ru/news/207670/>

Desecration of Tessaloniki Orthodox Cathedral during Divine Liturgy (GREECE)

August 1, 2016 - Greek police have arrested 26 protesters who raided the Greek Orthodox Cathedral in the northern city of Thessaloniki during Divine Liturgy.

The culprits were protesting against a police operation in the city on Wednesday in which squatters and refugees were evicted from three illegally occupied buildings.

One of the buildings is the property of the Greek Orthodox church and the city's archbishop said that it is being demolished to build a hospice for the terminally ill. The archbishop said that the protesters "destroyed what they could" at the Cathedral, but did not elaborate.

The protesters threw leaflets around the Gregory Palamas Cathedral before those attending Liturgy managed to drive them out.

Police said that the group of those arrested, believed to be anarchists, consisted of 19 men and seven women. Seventeen were Greek and the others were from Germany, England, Austria, Switzerland and Morocco.

Sources

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/greece.anarchists.raid.cathedral.26.arrested/91957.htm>

Desecration of Orthodox church in Kiev (UKRAINE)

August 2, 2016 - In Kiev a church of Christ Resurrection in Lesnoye cemetery was robbed, as reports Union of the Orthodox Journalists.

According to the senior of the congregation, archpriest Nikolay Kostrubitskiy, he revealed the loss of the repository of the Holy Gifts and Eucharistic kit elements. Besides, brazen evil-doers opened all donation boxes.

Soon after the news dean of the Cemetery deanery, archpriest Sergey Veigo, arrived at the place.

The police having arrived at the locale of the crime made up a description of the stolen items and accepted an application from the senior priest.

Photo documents from the Kiev Metropolitan Office of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/vandals-stole-the-holy-gifts-from-the-church-of-christ-resurrection-in-kiev>

<http://mitropolia.kiev.ua/zlovnisniki-ne-boyachis-boga-vinesli-syati-dari-z-pograbovanogo-nimi-xramu/>

Desecration of Orthodox St. Nicholas Cathedral in Vienna (AUSTRIA)

August 5, 2016 - The parish of the Moscow Patriarchate's St. Nicholas Cathedral in Vienna has lodged an official complaint against the players of "Pokemon Go," as reports pravoslavie.ru.

As noted in the complaint, participants in the game broke into the cathedral which is a "place of worship intended only for worship purposes," reports the site "The Local" on Friday.

Earlier the Russian Church addressed participants in the game "Pokemon Go," gaining worldwide popularity, with a call to respect the interests of other people.

"The developers of this game deliberately added a provocative dimension, proposing that absolutely any place could become a site for the game. I hope that the users of the game will have enough discretion to respect the interests of other people, social and religious organizations, and not to encroach upon the private lives of others," stated the deputy head of the Synodal Department for the Relationship of Church and Society and Media, Vakhtang Kipshidze.

According to him, not only sacred spaces, but private life, and museums are "spaces in which people realize their lawful interests and rights, and should not become a playground for players of this game without any limitations."

Sources

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/95955.htm>

<http://www.thelocal.at/20160805/vienna-church-furious-over-devil-pokemon>

Anti-establishment groups throw petrol bombs against Athens Holy Synod offices (GREECE)

August 8, 2016 - An orthodox church which houses the central office of the Church of Greece's Holy Synod was struck by arsonists, as reports the national herald.

Government spokeswoman Olga Gerovasili condemned the attack which happened in the early morning hours at the Moni Petraki church.

The attack is "abhorrent," Gerovasili said, noting that efforts were underway to find the perpetrators.

"Religious freedom, as enshrined in the Constitution, and the unhindered practice of religious worship are strictly protected by the State and no act of violence against them can be tolerated," she said.

The attack occurred at 3.10 a.m. when unidentified assailants threw four Molotov cocktails into the yard of the building which detonated, destroying two cars that had been parked outside, Kathimerini said.

The incident is the latest in a barrage of attacks against Churches across the country from self-styled anti-establishment groups, after the arrest of solidarity group members lately for charging into a Church into Thessaloniki.

Sources

<http://www.thenationalherald.com/132714/>

<http://orthodoxrights.org/desecration-of-tessloniki-orthodox-cathedral-during-divine-liturgy.html>

<http://en.protothema.gr/anti-establishment-groups-throw-petrol-bombs-against-athens-holy-synod-offices-photos/>

Two churches of the UOC robbed (UKRAINE)

September 30, 2016 - Once again two churches of the UOC were robbed- overnight donations were stolen from churches in Volyn. The estimated damage caused to the church property is 100 000 UAH. On the night of September 18 th to September 19 th , 2016 in the village Zaliznytsya Lyubeshivskij district of Volyn region the unknown stole donations from the Holy Protection Church. It is reported by the UOC Information and Education Department with reference to police communications sector of Volyn region.

The criminal entered the church and stole donations of the faithful. The estimated damage caused to the church property by the robbery – 100 thousand UAH, as the police reports.

That same night, the unknown stole donations from St. George's Church of the village Bereznaya Wola Lyubeshivskij district. The law enforcement agencies opened criminal proceedings on suspicion of burglary. Now the police are identifying people involved in the commission of these crimes.

Sources

<http://news.church.ua/2016/09/30/ocherednoj-raz-ogrableny-dva-xrama-upc-za-odnu-noch-poxishheny-pozhertvovaniya-iz-cerkvej-na-volyni/?lang=ru>

Bomb threat at Orthodox Danilov Monastery in Moscow (RUSSIA)

September 26, 2016 - Security officials have begun an inspection on the territory of Danilov Monastery in southern Moscow following an anonymous message about an

explosive device placed somewhere within the monastery, as reports pravoslavie.ru.

“There was an anonymous call of a bomb threat and an investigation is underway,” stated the agency source.

According to him there was no evacuation of the monastery.

The monastery is located at 22 Danilovsky Val. The staff of the operational services are carrying out the search on the territory of the monastery and the surrounding area.

Sources

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/97354.htm>

A bomb was used to sabotage the Congress of Orthodox women (UKRAINE)

September 27, 2016 - Unidentified criminals arranged an attempt against participants in a forum of the Congress of Orthodox women in Ukrainian Konotop, as reports interfax.

Law enforcement officers found an explosive device in the Konotop branch of the European University where registration of the participants was held, press service of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church reports.

At the same time, 15 radically minded representatives of the Azov civil regiment and Cossacks arrived to the site. They occupied seats in the Assembly Hall and blocked the opening ceremony.

Eventually, it took place in the Church of All Saints.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13290>

Monument to Holy Prince Vladimir desecrated in Kiev (UKRAINE)

September 27, 2016 - Unidentified criminals poured red paint onto the monument to the Holy Prince Vladimir, the Baptist of Russia. The question about initiating a criminal case is considered, as reports the union of the orthodox journalists.

“We have been reported. An investigation team operated at the scene. The monument was doused with red paint, presumably from a glass container. The report entered into a single register book. A question of qualification is being considered,” said Oksana Blischik, a spokesperson of the capital city police.

The monument to the Holy Prince Vladimir is the oldest monument in Kiev, it was constructed in 1853. It is located on Vladimir’s Hill on the bank of the Dnieper River.

All attempts to clean up the monument had no success by September 30th partly of the tall of the monument and of the strong paint poured on the copper.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/red-paint-poured-onto-the-monument-to-holy-prince-vladimir-in-kiev>

Vandals robbed the UOC Cathedral (UKRAINE)

September 12, 2016 - Unknown evil doers in Nikolayev robbed Saint Simon Cathedral of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Zavodskoy city district, as reports the union of the orthodox journalists.

Having damaged a metal plastic window, the vandals penetrated into the Saint Simon

Cathedral, located in General Karpenko Street in Zavodskoy district of Nikolayev, and stole donations of the parishioners – gold and silver ware placed inside icons.

Upon this fact there began a criminal proceeding by the signs of Part 3 Article 185 of the CC of Ukraine (“Theft”), whose sanction foresees punishment of imprisonment for a term of three up to six years.

Currently law enforcement officials are taking actions to establish and detain the persons involved in committing of the above crime.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/vandals-robbed-the-uoc-cathedral-in-nikolayev>

<http://pravlife.org/content/vory-snyali-yuvelirnye-podveski-s-ikon-v-nikolaev>

Vandals set on fire church of Christ the Savior (KOSOVO)

September 12, 2016 - An unfinished church of Christ the Savior in Pristina (Kosovo and Metohija) once more became a target of vandals’ assault. On September 9 unknown vandals broke metal gates of the church and set it on fire, as reports the union of the orthodox journalists.

Local priest Sasha Mitrovich established that one of the loops on the entrance door had been cut off, which enabled to throw the fire inside the church building. Having condemned another assault of the sanctity, bishop of Raška and Prizren Theodosius claimed the occurrence was caused by the ignorance of Kosovo authorities and the police regarding a request of the Serbian Church to provide regular security of the church, which is continually subjected to

abomination.

“Arson of the asset owned by the Orthodox Church of Serbia in the center of Pristina testifies, unfortunately, to the lack of adequate protection of our property items in Kosovo and Metohija. It is for the second time that we have set up metal gates at the unfinished church of Christ the Savior and twice they have been broken, this time aggravated by arson. Twice have we appealed to Kosovo Minister of Internal Affairs to ensure a regular police post – and twice have we received no response. Such an irresponsible attitude causes damage to all who live in Kosovo and Metohija and does not contribute to strengthening of confidence,” he said.

Representatives of the Church of Serbia reported about the incident to international representative offices in Kosovo and Metohija.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/v-mire/in-kosovo-vandals-set-on-fire-church-of-christ-the-savior-video>

The police of Rivne will be guarding temples (UKRAINE)

October 31, 2016 - After identifying the latest series of robberies of churches in the region, the national police of Rivne region (Ukraine) decided to guard the temples, as reports information service of the UOC.

On the night of October 28th to 29th the criminals again tried to rob two churches of Rovno Eparchy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, thus law enforcement officers promised to guard the temples, as reported by the UOC Information and Education Department.

The press service of the Rivne diocese notes that according to the abbot Herman (Kulakevich), the rector of St. Nicholas Church village Gilcha first Zdolbunov district, the criminals broke into the front door of the temple and the first door of palamarka, but they didn't manage to enter the church.

The situation is different in the village Velbivno, Ostrog district. According to Archpriest Alexander Maksimyuk, the dean of the churches of Ostrog district, the vandals knocked the door in the Holy Protection Church, entered and desecrated the temple, turned over the church utensils, but didn't find the money.

This is the second case in the Rivne diocese over the past week. Two temples of Ostrog deanery of the Rivne diocese of the UOC in the two neighboring villages – Sejanci and Tesovaja- were robbed in the night of October 21st to 22nd. Then the criminals stole donations for children with cancer.

On the facts of intentional damage to property the police officers launched a pre-trial investigation in criminal proceedings under Part 1 of Article 194 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine. This Article provides for a fine or corrective labor for up to two years, or up to three years imprisonment.

It should be noted that in Rivne region the criminals for several years have been robbing temples of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church unpunished. Last year alone, more than twenty acts of vandalism and robbery of churches were committed, none of the criminals up to this point have received due punishment.

According to the National Police Department Communications Division in the Rivne

region, the police in cooperation with the public forces will be guarding the temples of the Rivne region to prevent further thefts from churches.

Sources

<http://news.church.ua/2016/10/31/policejskie-rovenshhiny-budut-dezhurit-voze-xramov/?lang=ru>

Several Orthodox churches robbed in Ukraine – malefactors even stole donations for children with cancer (UKRAINE)

October 23, 2016 - For several years in the Rivne region (Ukraine) vandals have been robbing the UOC temples, none of the cases have been solved yet.

Two temples in Ostrog Deanery of Rivne Diocese of the UOC were robbed on the night of October 21d to 22d, 2016. The church in two neighboring villages also suffered – Sejanci and Tesov, as reported by the UOC Information and Education Department www.news.church.ua with reference to the website of the Rivne eparchy.

“Due to the tense situation with the looting of churches in the diocese – said the Head of diocese of Ostrog district Archpriest Alexander Maksimyuk – the believers and priests are trying to follow the churches and every night walk around the church territory. That is how this crime was revealed.”

It is worth mentioning that last year alone more than twenty acts of vandalism and robbery of churches were committed on the territory of the Rivne region, none of the crimes have been solved and the criminals haven't received due punishment.

According to the head of diocese, the churchwarden of St. Nicholas church in

Tesovo village noticed a broken door and called the police. The law enforcement officials found out that a considerable amount of money disappeared from the church cash register. Also, the attackers stole money from the box of donations for children with cancer.

A similar situation occurred in St. George's church in the village Sejanci. The Head of diocese called the rector of the local church after he became aware of the crime in Tesov. The priest came to the church and also found signs of burglary.

In both cases the thieves made a mess in the churches and took all the money from the cash register and boxes of donations, however, they were not interested in church utensils or old icons. The vandals didn't touch the Blessed Sacrament and the throne. The investigation and operational team of law enforcement is working on the ground.

According to the locals that night St. Mary Magdalene church of the UOC in Badovka neighboring village was also robbed. For two years the church has been occupied by the "Kiev Patriarchate".

On October 11th the Metropolitan of Sarny Anatoly sent an appeal to the President with a request to protect the religious feelings of believers and churches of the UOC from vandalism. In the Rivne region the criminals have been robbing for several years the temples of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church unpunished.

Sources

<http://news.church.ua/2016/10/23/na-rovenshhine-prestupniki-ograbili-neskolko-xramov-ukrali-dazhe-pozhertvovaniya-dlya-onkobolnyx-detej/?lang=ru>

Visitors at Estonian National Museum offered to kick Virgin Mary's image (ESTONIA)

October 3, 2016 - The National Museum which opened in Estonia in the presence of President Toomas Hendrik Ilves last week, is offering its visitors to kick one of the exhibits, an interactive image of Virgin Mary, causing the picture to fall into pieces, as reports interfax-religion.com.

The virtual painting has been criticized by a number of politicians, entrepreneurs and parliamentarians in the Postimees newspaper. Thus, according to Priit Sibul, who chairs the parliamentary faction of the ruling Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica, "kicking an image of the Mother of God is something they did in the Soviet cultural space but would not demonstrate in public."

Meanwhile, the chairman of the parliamentary opposition Conservative People's Party, Mart Helme, warned against a particularly negative reaction in the Russian-speaking community where religious traditions are especially strong.

"Most Russians living in Estonia are actively religious people and their integration is not helped by the religious insult approved on a state level," Helme said.

"The image should be removed as soon as possible because the virtual destruction the authors offer insults the feelings of religious Russian-speaking residents and hinders their integration," the politician was quoted in his party's press release as saying.

According to Helme, who was Estonia's ambassador to Russia in the 1990s, "mocking of the symbols of faith also has a political dimension to it." "An attack on symbols may lead to an escalation of social

tensions and a cooling of the inter-state relations,” he said.

For his part, Archbishop Urmas Viilma of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church said the image is an affront to the whole Estonian society, all Christians, not just Orthodox ones but Catholics and Lutherans as well. For Estonians, Virgin Mary has a special meaning, no wonder the country is popularly called the Land of Mary, the archbishop said.

The installation on display at the Estonian National Museum is a depiction of Virgin Mary on a big light screen almost the size of a human being. It is static until someone kicks a specially marked spot at the bottom of the picture, causing the virtual figure fly into pieces and the word “Reformation” appear on the screen.

The Estonian National Museum is open in the city of Tartu and set to become the country’s most important. It is predicted to attract up to 200,000 visitors per year.

Sources

<http://www.interfax-religion.com/?act=news&div=13307>

The monument of Baptist of Rus was once again desecrated (UKRAINE)

October 4, 2016 - The unknown painted swastikas on the monument to St. Prince Vladimir.

In the park “Vladimir hill” in the center of Kiev the unknown painted swastikas on the monument to St. Prince Vladimir, as sedmitza.ru reports.

The incident occurred on Sunday night, as reports the press service of the Ukrainian

Orthodox Church. This is the second act of vandalism in the last week in respect of the monument. As reported, on September 26th the attackers poured red paint on the monument. It is the oldest sculptural monument in Kiev, built in 1853. It stands on St. Vladimir’s Hill on the banks of the Dnieper River. The sculptor of 4.4-meter statue is Pyotr Klodt, 16-meter pedestal – Alexander Ton, bas-reliefs – Vasily Demuth-Malinovsky. Every year in late June the church-public celebration of Baptism of Kievan Rus is held at the monument.

Sources

<http://www.sedmitza.ru/text/6648817.html>

<http://news.church.ua/2016/10/02/v-kieve-vtoroj-raz-zanedelyu-vandaly-nadrugalis-nad-pamyatnikom-svyatomu-knyazyu-vladimiru/?lang=ru>

Arson of an Orthodox church (UKRAINE)

November 7, 2016 - About two o’clock in the morning, Pavlograd local residents saw a fire in the Saints Cyril and Methodius church of the UOC. The people who called the police and the fire service also noticed two masked men running away from the church, reports a UOJ.

“Police and firefighters arrived very quickly, – says the rector, Archpriest Andrei Demidas. – They found that 4 firebombs had been thrown into the church. One of them, which was targeted at the altar, thank God, did not work – the fuse fell out of it. But the other three caught fire, and the church suffered serious damage. Today I have to go to the police and write a report about what happened.”

The fire destroyed the choir with books, damaged walls and church utensils.

According to the priest, he had neither received any threats before nor encountered any hostility.

The Saints Cyril and Methodius Church was built 10 years ago on donations of parishioners. Believers are intending to restore it by joint efforts. In spite of the fire, service in the church will continue.

The rector and parishioners of the church ask prayers of the faithful.

The UOJ is following the developments.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/unidentified-masked-men-set-fire-to-ss-cyril-and-methodius-church-in-pavlograd-photo>

Desecration of Orthodox religious monuments (GREECE)

November 6, 2016 - According to the public sources, the vast majority of religious monuments in Greece desecrated recently are owned by the Orthodox Church.

The Greek news agency romfea informed in its report of the incidents which occurred in Greece in 2015 and were directed against the places of worship, as reports zyorna.ru website. This report, published by the Department for religious freedom and interfaith relations of the Office for Religious Education General Secretariat for Greek religions, reads as follows:

- 138 of these objects belong to Christian denominations; in particular 137 belong to the Greek Orthodox Church, and one to the Catholic Church,
- in total 147 various religious facilities in Greece have been desecrated,

- 4 objects of Judaism and 5 - Islamic have also been desecrated.

Therefore, there have been a lot more cases of vandalism of Orthodox monuments in modern Greece than to the objects of other Greek denominations.

Sources

<http://zyorna.ru/news/news/v-gretsii-podvergajutsja-oskverneniju-pravoslavnye-religioznye-pamjatniki.html%20>

<http://www.romfea.gr/diafora/11281-gia-proti-fora-stin-ellada-katagrafoun-ta-thriskeutika-mnimeia-pou-bandalizontai>

Five icons stolen from UOC church in Vinnitsa region (UKRAINE)

December 13, 2016 - St. Alexander Nevsky's Church was robbed in Vinnitsa region (Ukraine), on the night of December 11, as reports the union of the orthodox journalists.

Thieves stole icons of the Last Supper, the Virgin, Alexander Nevsky and two more icons.

"At about 6.50 in the morning the sexton alerted the priest with a call saying that when he had approached the side door of the church he saw it broken down with an axe - the intruders might have failed to unlock the door. Inside the church everything was tumbled down, the icons at the altar were missing. All around looked devastating...." - said mother Natalia.

The icon of Alexander Nevsky was cut out of the frame. The rest of the icons were taken with the frames.

The church has been burgled for the third time. 5 years ago the icon of St. Panteleimon was stolen from the church. It was also cut out of the frame. Then a parishioner of the church bought a new icon in Pochaev to replace the stolen.

The police opened criminal proceedings on the fact of robbery.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/five-icons-stolen-from-uoc-church-in-vinnitsa-region>

Orthodox church desecrated and set on fire in Crete (GREECE)

December 18, 2016 - Vandals set fire on a Greek Orthodox church in the Lagolio village of Crete and wrote "Allah is great", as reports Greek reporter.

Unknown perpetrators set fire to the Church of Archangel Michael in Lagolio, burning holy icons and part of the chancel.

A passerby saw the fire and notified local residents who ran to put out the fire before it spread. The perpetrators had also written "Allah is great" in Arabic on the walls.

The desecration of the church took place between 3 to 5 p.m., according to police sources. Police forces from Heraklion and Tymbaki are investigating the incident.

The Church of Archangel Michael is an important pilgrimage for the region and attracts many believers from surrounding areas to its annual feast.

Sources

<http://greece.greekreporter.com/2016/12/18/vandals-on-the-island-of-crete-set-church-on-fire-write-allah-is-great/>

Alexander Nevsky Sunday School destroyed during shelling of Debaltseve (UKRAINE)

December 26, 2016 - About ten shells from the front line were fired December 23, 2016 in the city of Debaltseve, Donetsk Oblast,

Ukraine. Shells of no less than a 150 mm caliber were used during the shelling, which are prohibited by the Minsk Accords, as reports pravoslavie.ru.

One of the shells fell on the territory of the Alexander Nevsky Church. The Sunday School building was significantly damaged: one wall was fully destroyed, the rest partially. Thankfully there were no children in the building at the time. Windows in the church were broken, the façade was damaged by shrapnel, and the metal door was punctured. A new cupola lying on the ground was also damaged.

Additionally, a kindergarten, school, and residential building in Debaltseve were damaged during the shelling. There were no casualties.

Sources

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/99790.htm>

<http://gorlovka-eparhia.com.ua/obstrel-alexandro-nevskogo-hrama-v-debaltsevo-razrushena-voskresnaya-shkola-1/>

Crucifixion of Jesus Christ desecrated on New Year's Eve (UKRAINE)

December 31, 2016 - In Uman the unknown damaged a plaster figure of Christ mounted on a wooden cross at the river bank, reports UOJ with reference to the press service of the National police of the Cherkassy region.

An investigation team was set up to handle the case. The plaster figure of crucified Jesus was knocked down and the wooden cross was attempted to burn. It is not reported where the figure is now and what state it is in.

The case is registered; criminal proceedings on the grounds of Article 161 (violation of

equal rights of citizens depending on their race, nationality, religion, disability and other grounds) of the Criminal Code of Ukraine are initiated.

The current legislation provides for liability up eight years' imprisonment for such offences. Investigations are underway.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/sobytiya/crucifixion-of-jesus-christ-desecrated-in-uman-on-new-year-s-eve>

A. Reaction of the Local Orthodox Churches to the vandalism and the desecration of the Orthodox worship and sacred places

The Abbot of Visoki Decani Monastery responded to an attempted armed attack against the Monastery (KOSOVO)

January 31, 2016 - The Abbot of Visoki Decani Monastery Fr. Sava Janjić confirmed that the monks and the personnel employed at the monastery feel safe and that this incident is one more indication that the presence of KFOR, which has been protecting the monastery for the last 16 years is of essential importance. The Monastery belongs to the World Cultural Heritage of UNESCO.

Visoki Decani Monastery has suffered four armed attacks since the end of the war. Police have investigated only one attack and one Kosovo Albanian in 2007 was sentenced on 2.5 years for the attack on the monastery.

Sources

<http://www.eparhija-prizren.com/en/news/communique-four-armed-islamists-arrested-yesterday-evening-front-main-gate-visoki-decani-monast>

Police proved the accusation of the “Freedom” party of Zhytomyr towards the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to be a provocative act (UKRAINE)

January 25, 2016 - Act of vandalism was created by a resident of the city of Zhytomyr. It happened on the site of future temple construction, situated on Privokzalnaya place. As it was found out by the police

officers, the man does not affiliate with any religion, as reported by the Union of Orthodox Journalists.

In his turn Nikodim, the ruling bishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), the bishop of Zhytomyr, claimed that the Church had nothing to do with the act of vandalism and called the above accusation a provocative act. “Cross is a holy thing no matter who has set it up”, said the bishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate).

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/novosti/sobytiya/pol-ts-ya-p-dtverdila-shcho-zvinuvachennya-zhitomirsko-svobodi-u-b-k-upts-provokats-ya>

Robbery in an Orthodox temple (RUSSIA)

February 15, 2016 - The police of Kazan (Russia) are searching for a robber who got into Yaroslavl Miracle-Workers church, located in the territory of Arskoye cemetery, as the website Interfax-Religion reports.

“According to the preliminary data, donation boxes were broken and gold jewelry, hanging on the icons, was stolen” says the Press Service of the Administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation for Kazan.

Rector of the church Archpriest Alexei Chumakov said that the value of missing objects was not in themselves, but rather its symbolism. “For us it is important not

the gold and jewelry, but the evidence that people received assistance from the miraculous image”, as reports Business Online.

A range of investigation procedures is being carried out. The procedures are to substantiate the fact of the robbery and arrest the suspect. The damages are being assessed.

Sources

<http://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/302180>

Reaction to the statement of Kosovo police (kp) spokesperson Mr. Baki Kelani (KOSOVO)

February 2, 2016 - Serbian Orthodox Church press service published reaction of Archimandrite Sava Janjic to the statement of Kosovo police (kp) spokesperson Mr. Baki Kelani, we provide the full text of the message below:

In his statement for local media the Kosovo police spokesperson Baki Kelani said yesterday that the armed persons who were arrested two nights ago in front of our Monastery had nothing to do with terrorism and that it was only a case of illegal weapons possession. Kelani also said that „the car with suspects had been seen much before but was stopped by police in the street, which was the most appropriate location for the police“.

In relation to this statement it is very important to have in mind that appearance of armed persons with Islamist literature in the car is far from an ordinary case of illegal weapons possession. The arrested were definitely not tourists and the Police must investigate what they were doing

armed in the vicinity of the Monastery at night. As the incident happened in front of the Monastery gate we are particularly interested to have all the fact on this incident fully published. Kelani's hasty statement that armed Wahhabists have nothing to do with terrorism is an insult for common sense and is damaging for Kosovo Police credibility.

At the same time it is not true that Kosovo police stopped the car with suspects. In the video material from CCTV cameras around the monastery one can clearly see that it was the Islamists themselves who had stopped the car in front of the Monastery and that police patrol came only later, checked their documents and searched the car. Today

we showed this material to the local chief of the police who had been out of Kosovo until yesterday. It is sad indeed that the KP spokesperson Mr. Kelani gave incorrect statements without having learned the facts beforehand and without anybody from KP requesting to see the video files immediately after the incident. Publishing arbitrary information is creating an impression of downplaying of the case for unknown reasons which is not to the benefit of Kosovo citizens regardless of their ethnic or religious background as the terrorism is a danger for all. This is also damaging already diminished confidence of our Church in Kosovo police particularly regarding the protection of our sites which are no longer protected by KFOR.

We strongly believe that the Police will for the sake of transparency and professionalism of their work inform the public with all details of this case and that this incident will not remain one among

many ones which have remained unsolved.

Fr. Sava Janjić

The Abbot of Visoki Dečani Monastery

Sources

<http://orthodoxrights.org/four-armed-islamists-arrested-in-front-of-the-main-gate-of-visoki-decani-serbian-orthodox-monastery.html>

http://www.spc.rs/eng/archimandrite_sava_janjic_reaction_statement_kosovo_police_spokesperson_mr_baki_kelani

Communique of Raška-Prizren Diocese (KOSOVO)

April 15, 2016 - Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Raška and Prizren published communique on the latest at the church of Christ the Savior in Priština, as reports official website of the Diocese.

Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Raška and Prizren has condemned strongly the latest incident at the still unfinished church of Christ the Savior in Priština downtown. This is one among many incidents perpetrated by hooligans who have been showing open disrespect towards Christian religious sites. The local press in Albanian language has published these days a photo showing unknown individuals who climbed the church without authorization of the owner, the Serbian Orthodox Church. No Kosovo officials have condemned this incident as well as many previous incidents at this site. We can only imagine what reaction would be if religious sites of other religious communities were targeted?

Apparently it will take time for hooligans to learn to respect religious sites, but the main problem in this case is indifference of Kosovo institutions, primarily Kosovo police, which has done nothing so far to prevent and

sanction such and similar actions. Bishop of Raška and Prizren Teodosije wrote twice last year to Kosovo ministers of Interior, Spatial Planning and Culture requesting police to secure the church from frequent acts of desecration and disrespect. Especially sad is the use of the church and her walls as a public toilette, which we could see at the beginning of this year during one of massive protests in Priština. Regrettably, the Diocese has not yet received answer to these letters which indicates that Kosovo police is not ready to adequately protect this site. We cannot but notice that such an attitude towards religious, especially Christian sites is inflicting most damage to Kosovo institutions as it demonstrates elementary disrespect towards European and civilizational norms.

For Serbian Orthodox Church the church of Christ the Savior is a religious site with consecrated foundations and the Church expects from Kosovo institutions to provide normal conditions for the completion of this church and grant full freedom of religion to Orthodox Christians according to laws.

Diocese of Raška and Prizren

Serbian Orthodox Church, Prizren – Gračannica 15 April 2016

Sources

<http://www.eparhija-prizren.com/en/news/latest-incident-church-christ-savior-pristina-communique-diocese>

Primate of ROC calls on international human rights activists to stop lawlessness towards UOC (UKRAINE)

June 2, 2016 - Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia called on the international community to protect the structures of the

canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church and stop raider seizure of Orthodox churches in Ukraine, as reports union of orthodox journalists.

Seizure of churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is a “flagrant violation of human rights and religious freedom,” said the ROC Primate on Thursday, during the Easter reception at the Russian Foreign Ministry. He expressed hope that these facts will attract attention of the public organizations and the countries that are really concerned about human rights.

“There are still continuing raider attacks on the UOC churches by representatives of non-canonical religious associations, with the support, unfortunately, of militants-nationalists and often local authorities. We would like our voice to sound stronger so that it will stop lawlessness,” said the Patriarch.

He expressed regret that the radical political forces are trying to give the conflict the interfaith character, involving the Church into it, which, according to the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, is “the only social force that holds the real peacemaking potential.” Patriarch Kirill added that now the Church is subject to massive information pressure.

Sources

<http://uoj.org.ua/en/novosti/zashchita-tserkvi/primate-of-roc-calls-on-international-human-rights-activists-to-stop-lawlessness-towards-uoc>

Diocese of Raska-Prizren and Kosovo-Metohija commune on the facts of recent desecration of an Orthodox chapel and cemetery

October 3, 2016 - Diocese of Raska-Prizren and Kosovo-Metohija of Serbian Orthodox

Church published commune on the facts of recent desecration of an orthodox chapel and cemetery.

On the occasion of a recent visit to the Serbian Orthodox communal cemetery in Priština, Fr. Saša Mitrović the local priest could see sad and disturbing scenes. Recently repaired and cleaned the cemetery chapel was turned into a public toilette and a garbage dump, many graves have been overrun by weeds. Regrettably, this is happening regardless of the communal care by Priština municipality and a presence of a paid guardian. These scenes remind so much of those in the church of Christ the Savior in downtown Priština where the Serbian Orthodox Diocese began cleaning of the site from garbage. The cleaning was interrupted by municipal inspectors (without any judicial order) who forbade any access to the church and continuation of the cleaning.

As the All Saints Day is approaching many Priština Serbs, the most of which cannot freely return and live in the city of their birth, will visit the graves of their dear ones. It is the duty of the Diocese to organize cleaning of the cemetery chapel and the cemetery. There remains a question whether the Priština mayor will be so ardent to send inspectors again and suspend the works although he has done nothing to prevent using the Orthodox Christian sites as public toilettes.

Bishop Teodosije has given a statement that it is so disturbing and difficult to understand that in the Kosovo capital in 21st century Christian sites are used as public toilettes. This demonstrates and alarming absence of culture and elementary civilizational norms, said the Bishop. Priština Mayor Shpend Ahmeti has recently said in his interview to KIM radio that it was not the duty of the Municipality to take care whether religious

sites are vandalized or damaged explaining why he did not take any measures after numerous vandalisms and the recent setting of fire in the church of Christ the Savior. However, as Ahmeti said, the Municipality is responsible to prevent “any repairs” in these sites including cleaning and white-washing of walls. Such blatant manipulations with religious rights are a shame for the Kosovo society, said Bishop Teodosije, emphasizing that no one can stop the Church to take care of the dignity of her holy sites and protect them from vandal attacks.

Sources

<http://www.eparhija-prizren.com/en/news/sad-scenes-orthodox-christian-cemetery-pristina-chapel-turned-public-toilette-many-graves-overr>

Conclusions

The year 2016 has seen an overall increase of registered violations against Orthodox Christians compared to the previous year. Whereas 2015 has seen more registered violations in the December and January period, the attacks in 2016 have been much more dispersed across the entire year. The perpetrators have become indiscriminate in when and where they violate Orthodox Christian symbols, places of worship and believers themselves.

1. The amount of registered incidents of inhumane treatment, harassment and intimidation has remained the same in Russia in comparison to the previous year. Some hostile attitudes to Orthodox Christianity remain in Albania, Greece and Kosovo. Ukraine has seen a much larger amount of recorded violations compared to 2015. In this country the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) is continued to be attacked by different authorities representatives and by various public groups.

2. In 2016 Orthodox Christians have seen cases of discrimination in different European countries. In Greece, the Orthodox Church has begun to see an increasing amount of restrictions on her freedom of expression. Some representatives of the state are increasingly attempting to push the Church away from the media and the education system. In Russia, this has been shown with the withholding of state funding from Orthodox Christian schools. In Ukraine, this is evident in numerous instances of Ukrainian authorities' inaction or collaboration with the Kyiv Patriarchate in expropriating churches and land from

the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. International organizations such as the UN and the OSCE have noted these attacks, and reports are available.

In Ukraine more worrisome is the fact that two draft bills were attempted to pass during 2016: No 4128 and No 4511 in the Verkhovna Rada (the Ukrainian Parliament). The draft bill No 4128 foresees that individuals may unilaterally declare their religious allegiance to any religious community without consent of this community and then change the judicial status of its property. This draft bill had the intention of passing parishes from one religious community to another. In the context of the current hostility from members of the Kyiv Patriarchate, this draft bill is seen as an attempt of the Kyiv Patriarchate to "legally" seize property from the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), as well as disinherit it from its historical presence in Ukraine.

The draft bill No 4511 presumes the special status of religious organizations whose directing center is located in the state recognized by the Rada as the aggressor country. The special status means the discriminatory measures and the control of the interior activity of a religious organization by the political authorities.

On the 16th of July the Rada adopted the call to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to accord the independent status to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. By this act the political institution in a secular state directly interfered into internal

religious affairs. There were also plans to register a draft bill to return the Lavra of Potsyaev and the Lavra of Kyiv under the state control in order to liberate them from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) and to concede them to the Kyiv Patriarchate.

These draft bills are seditious and are contributing to the on-going religious strife within Ukraine. They also go against the Constitution of Ukraine, and do not find support from the majority of the population of the country.

In 2016, there have been protests against some initiatives on some state legislation in Romania, Georgia, and Greece.

3. In 2016, recorded cases of defamation have increased in number compared to 2015, and especially in Ukraine. In this nation, defamation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) is conducted by important mass media, activists from nationalist groups and some representatives of the state authorities. The tactic usually involves linking the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as being linked to Russia, and as such as being an enemy element of the country.

In 2016, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate has taken a peaceful initiative, and has organized a peace-loving, Cross-bearing procession from the 3rd to the 28th of July whose goal was peace and prayer for Ukraine. Two separate groups marched from the east and west of the country, passing through its various villages and cities. A large number of people have joined them. Then, they met in Kiev, and conducted a mutual prayer for peace in Ukraine. During the entire event, the procession has faced false accusations,

defamatory claims and threats in the media. Furthermore, in some cities, they faced harassment from radical groups and even from some local municipal administrations. Some Ukrainian politicians and officials have continually claimed that the Cross-bearing procession can be used by Russia to destabilize the country.

The past year has also seen a condemnation from the European Parliament, which has an indirect reference to the Russian Orthodox Church in its November 23, 2016 resolution. The text states that the Russian government is employing 'religious' groups' in its global quest of being the global defender of Christian values. We find this clause disturbing and seditious, and we remind the European institutions that the Russian Orthodox Church is an independent organization whose goal is religious worship according to Orthodox Christian traditions. The Russian Orthodox Church is not a tool in any government's hand.

The similar situation of defamation and discrimination because of some alleged political position is still observed in the Balkans toward Serbian Orthodox Church in Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia.

In Greece, the defamation campaign is sensitive due to a presence of a large amount of Muslim refugee population, some of whose members have shown hostility to the Greek Orthodox Church.

4. A similar concept of hate speech and humiliation has also seen increases in 2016 compared to 2015, and with a larger increase in Ukraine. Just as with the defamation campaign, this is a part of a larger struggle against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate).

There are also increased amounts of physical attacks against Orthodox priests and the faithful compared to last year, as well as an incident of a priest's wife being killed.

5. The number of registered incidents of prevention of freedom of assembly has almost tripled compared to 2015, with the majority of increases recorded in Ukraine and Kosovo. In Ukraine, this often involves activists from the Kyiv Patriarchate or the "Right Sector" in blocking access to Orthodox churches. The vast majority of takeovers of the Kyiv Patriarchate have been recorded in the Western Ukrainian regions of Volyn, Rivne and Lviv oblasts, and primarily in small villages. There are also increased instances of the "Right Sector" group preventing the Orthodox faithful from assembling for cross processions and mutual worship.

In Kosovo, recorded problems with freedom of assembly have quadrupled since 2015. The majority of instances include Albanians in preventing the Orthodox Serbs from worshiping in their churches. Some such instances have included physical violence and attacks on the faithful. Other instances have seen Albanians in demanding the destruction or conversion of Orthodox churches. Reports state that local authorities have not caught the perpetrators, and other reports claim that the authorities of Kosovo are active in discriminating against the Serbian Orthodox population.

6. Recorded cases of vandalism have increased overall in Europe. In the case of Ukraine, vandalism has more than doubled compared to the previous year. Just as with the previous year, incidents involve arson, desecration of Orthodox holy sites, robberies, and hostile graffiti. Numerous miraculous icons and images have been

destroyed across Europe. Unlike in 2015, new countries on the list include Germany and Austria.

In Kosovo, the number of vandalism cases has not changed. This is part of the on-going tension between the Kosovo Albanian and Serbian populations.

7. Orthodox Churches across all of Europe have published statements condemning attacks and discrimination against them. The respect for secular character of states and the freedom of religion is one of the most fundamental rights laid out in the European Charter of Human Rights. Orthodox Churches continue to espouse their views through the media, state and international organisation..

Photos



July 7, 2016. Hegumen Daniel (Sokolov) Father Superior of St. Trinity Danilov Monastery was killed in his cell In Pereslavl-Zalessky (Russia)



January 9, 2016. Gorchuk Irina, was attacked and beaten in village of Ptichia (Ukraine) during the cross procession, organized by Orthodox pilgrims from Kiev



April 28, 2016. Criminals attacked a house of the rector of St. Andrew Church in Dnepropetrovsk (Ukraine), beaten Archpriest Anatoly Lysenko and killed his wife Irina.





June 10, 2016. Men in camouflage and balaclavas seized UOC church in village Kolosovaya (Ukraine)



June 6, 2016. Turks hang pro-Islamic Ramadan banner on Greek Orthodox Church



August 10, 2016. A provocative billboard displayed in Obuhov (Ukraine) directed against the Russian Orthodox Church



May 4, 2016. Priest and the believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church blocked at the enter the cemetery to perform a memorial service at the graves of deceased relatives



July 13, 2016 Ukrainian nationalists crying out rude insulting slogans and all sorts of slander, intimidating the faithful, during the all-Ukrainian orthodox cross procession



February 24, 2016. Arson in the temple of Mother of God in the city Mykolaiv, in Lviv region (Ukraine)



January 25, 2016. 34 year-old resident of Zhytomyr (Ukraine) dismantled the Orthodox worship wooden cross on the site of future temple construction.



August 8, 2016. The central office of the Church of Greece's Holy Synod was struck by arsonists,



April 25, 2016. Attempt to set fire to a wooden Ukrainian Orthodox Church



November 7 2016. Saints Cyril and Methodius church of the UOC arson.



December 26, 2016. Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Sunday School destroyed and nearby church damaged during shelling of Debaltseve (Ukraine)



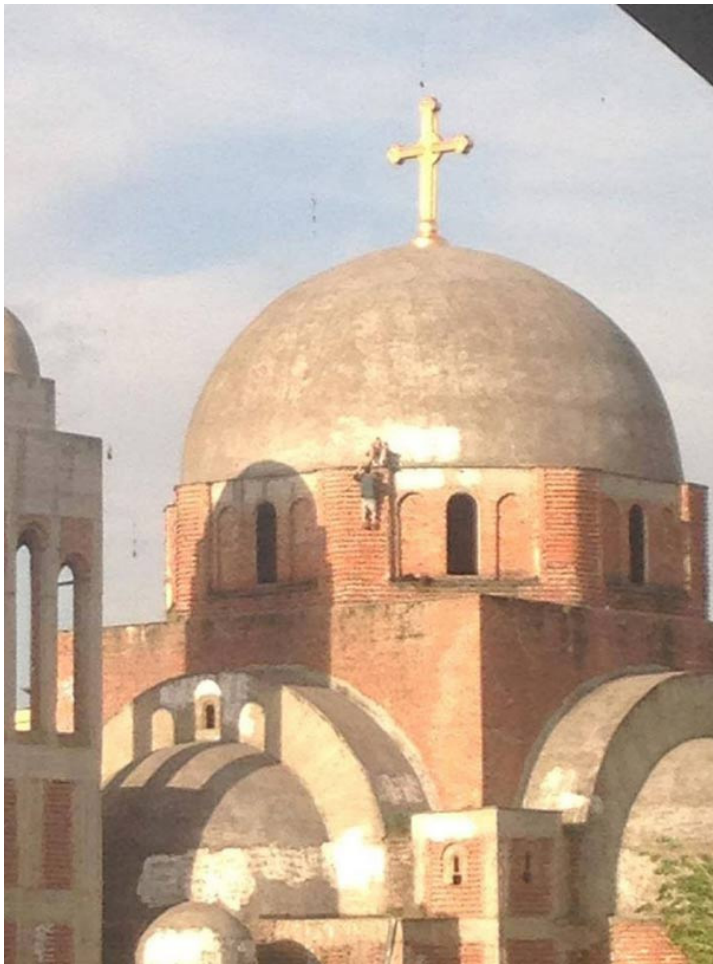
September 27, 2016. Monument to Holy Prince Vladimir the Baptist of Russia desecrated in Kiev.



December 18, 2016. Vandals set fire on a Greek Orthodox church in the Lagolio village of Crete and wrote "Allah is great".



February 2, 2016. Anarchists sprayed the building of the diocese of Salonika (Greece); one man went to the hospital because they threw the colour in his face and his body.



April 15, 2016. Kosovo police is not ready to adequately protect sites of Serbian Orthodox Church from frequent acts of desecration and disrespect, for instance the church of Christ the Savior in Priština was used as public toilet.



March 17, 2016. Sacrilege and an insult of religious feelings inside the historic Orthodox churches of Berati and Elbasan (Albania)



January 31, 2016. Four armed Islamists arrested in front of the main gate of Visoki Dečani Serbian Orthodox Monastery (Kosovo)

orthodoxrights.org

The "Centre for Monitoring the Rights and Freedom of Orthodox Christians in Europe" invites the cooperation of everyone. You can communicate to us any mistake or inaccuracy that you find in the information on the website. Any additional and new information, proved by documents, photos or video about violations of the rights of Orthodox Christians in Europe related to their religion, is also welcome.